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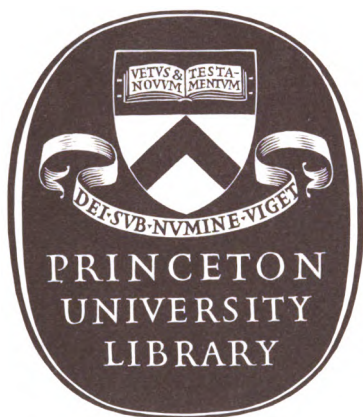
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MAY TEMPLETON:

A TALE OF FAITH AND LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

“Thou hast been long alone,
Come to thy mother;
In darkness wast thou left,
Come to thy sisters.”—FELICIA HEMANS.

12 15084 “Run up stairs, Manetta, and attend to your mistress. She has fallen into one of her troublesome fainting-fits, from which you understand better than myself how to arouse her. At the same time, my good girl, do try to make that child Lucia cease screaming, and do not allow her at present to communicate either with the other servants or any one happening to call during my absence. I am obliged to leave home for a few hours, but shall return in the evening, and hope to find your mistress quite recovered as usual—thanks to your good nursing. Recollect about Lucia, she is such an incurable little storyteller, and has imagination enough for any invention, however wild or untrue. You understand me, Manetta.”

B These words were addressed in Italian by a young Englishman to a handsome, but somewhat bold-looking waiting-woman, whom, with an air of true Southern indolence, he found lounging about the portico of his present

B

home—a picturesque villa in the immediate neighbourhood of Florence.

“She is for ever wanting something or other,” muttered the girl, rising, with sullen gesture, to obey her master’s directions.

“And see here, Manetta,” said the gentleman, following Manetta, and slipping a sovereign into her hand,—“here is something to buy a pretty dress for the approaching carnival. If it should not be enough for all that is required to set off that pretty face of yours to the best advantage, ask me for more. You are a good, obedient girl, Manetta, and I am always glad to reward you.”

“*Grazie, signore!*” replied the girl, as with a saucy smile and half-sneering expression of countenance, she slowly ascended the polished marble steps leading to her mistress’s boudoir. “He has been in one of his wild English furies again, I suppose,” was her meditation the mean while, “or he would neither be so polite or so generous. Manetta’s silence will have to be purchased at higher wages than for a paltry sovereign one of these days, I fancy, if somebody does not have a care what he’s about. That poor signora of his doesn’t look very likely to last many months longer. Whatever she married the English madman for passes my understanding. She, with her money, and her beauty!—not a poor empty-pocketed wretch like Manetta, who, for the sake of being a fine lady, and having nothing to do, like the rest of them, would not mind putting up with the temper of a red Indian. But, *misericordia!* a woman, be she lady or serving-maid, never guesses her husband’s dark side till she’s passed her word at the altar, and the time for changing it is over. Hark, now, to that poor unfortunate child!—but I must put a stop to this squalling, or no more golden coins for Manetta;” and slipping the money into the bright-coloured purse, or

rather reticule, suspended, along with other articles equally showy, from the taper waist above, Manetta opened the door of the sitting-room.

"What are you making all this noise about, Signorina Lucia?" was the severe inquiry, as a little girl, apparently between six and seven years of age, ran up, sobbing violently, and threw herself at Manetta's feet.

"She is dead! she is dead! Manetta. My own beautiful, darling mamma! It was papa—he has killed her!" exclaimed the child, renewing her hysterical screaming.

"Hush—hush, signorina! It is no such thing; you must not tell such naughty, wicked falsehoods. Your papa is a good gentleman, and would not kill anybody, much less your pretty mamma. The signora has only fainted; run up stairs and bring me some smelling-salts from her dressing-table, but first leave off that screeching;" and kneeling down, the waiting-woman hastily unloosened the dress of a lady lying, to all appearance, lifeless on the ground. Lifting the fragile form in her arms, Manetta laid it on a richly-ornamented couch beside the window, and having mixed a few drops of strong aromatic essence in water, she began to bathe her mistress's forehead, with more tenderness than her former manner and tone of speaking might have led a looker-on to expect.

In order to revive the patient more thoroughly, it became necessary to lay aside the thick wavy hair clustering around the brow; and in doing this the mark of a heavy blow immediately above the left-side temple became visible. The faint purple colour deepened gradually as the water reached the spot.

"He's done for her, I do believe, this time, a cruel ruffian!—but it's no matter of mine," soliloquized the attendant. "She'll be better off where she's either gone outright, or, to judge from this mark, soon will go, than

with the like of him, I'll venture to say ; for if ever a good Catholic, or a real saint, lived on the face of this bad earth, she's lying here now ; that is to say, her body is, for I see little, little sign of anything else. Well, I wish none of us may have more on our conscience by-and-by, when our time comes, than she's had, and that's easier wished than granted. Are you or are you not going to cease that noise, Signorina Lucia, because if it doesn't stop in another minute, I'll take and lock you up upstairs, you bad, disobedient child. I must go and bid Paolo fetch the doctor to your mamma, but I don't leave the room till you are quiet."

Manetta could not have hit on a better expedient to obtain silence—the crying instantly stopped, while even the inward sobbing, an almost uncontrollable display of excitement in children of Lucia's age and disposition, was forced back with an effort worthy a woman of six-and-twenty, and a well-disciplined woman into the bargain, rather than of a child with the twenty years subtracted.

"And remember, signorina," continued the maid, putting her finger on the little one's lip ; "not a word to him of what has happened—the doctor I mean,—not a word, except that your mamma fell down in a fainting-fit while she was crossing the room."

"Indeed, she did no such thing," cried the child ; "and I won't say it. Papa pushed her down. I was playing at the other end of the room, and turned round just in time to see him ; he had been asking her to do something for him—I don't know what it was, because he spoke in English ; but I heard mamma say 'No, it was impossible ; it would be contrary to her religion ;' her voice sounded so sadly, Manetta, that I turned round to go and kiss her. She was standing by that table up there, and papa by the window. The moment she said these words, he gave one long stride, and saying some more English words I do not know the

meaning of, only they seemed very ugly, he knocked her head with such a hard, hard blow, and she fell backwards. That's the truth, Manetta; and when the doctor comes, I'll tell him all about it. I will—I will!" went on the excited child, hardly knowing in her terror and distress what Manetta wished her to do or not to do. "I will tell him all about it, every single word; and how my own darling, precious mamma——"

"Oh! you will—will you, my little signorina," exclaimed the servant, not waiting the conclusion of the sentence; "we can soon settle that question;" and snatching Lucia in her arms, Manetta tied a handkerchief over her mouth, to prevent the little signorina's screaming from being heard by the rest of the household, carried her up to a garretlike-looking apartment at the top of the house; and in order to make assurance doubly sure, fastened the child's sash to an old-fashioned bedpost, and retired, bolting the door behind her.

"Manetta—Manetta—Manetta!" shrieked the poor child; "let me come back. I will do what you tell me. I will not say a word about it; indeed—indeed, I won't;—only let me out to my dead—dead—dead, dear mamma. Manetta you're too cruel; come back—come back."

"*Madre mia*, protect us!" muttered the girl, crossing herself, as the agonized cries reached her ears. "I wish I were well out of this house; more than all, that I had never been the fool—the worse than fool—to enter it." And she ran up stairs again. "Will you promise, then—faithfully promise—faithfully, signorina," she asked, opening the door and looking in, "to hold your tongue, and not tell what has happened, if I allow you to come down."

"Yes—yes! indeed I will; only untie me and I will promise not to say a word."

"You swear you won't, then?"

"No, Manetta, not swear ; but I will promise ; and I never, you know, broke my promises."

"If you do, signorina, the black lady comes to-night, when you are in bed, remember, and every one asleep."

The child shuddered, and turned white as death.

"Indeed, Manetta, I will keep my promise ;—please do not frighten me as you did the other day, it will kill me."

"Well, come down, then, and do not be so passionate. Your mamma is not dead ; she is only stunned by her fall. Remember this ! If any questions are asked—you saw her fall, did you not ? "

"Yes, papa——"

"You are to forget that part of the story, child. Your papa did not mean it ; and if you say a word about him and what you told me just now, he will be taken up, poor fellow, and put into prison, all through his wicked, cruel little girl, who made the doctor believe he meant to kill her mamma, when he was quite innocent of such a thought, and only rather angry, as all English gentlemen are sometimes. Ah ! the black lady comes every night after that, as the clock strikes twelve, from Santa Maria del Fiore, shaking her long—long finger out there ;" and the maid pointed mysteriously to the door, while the terrified Italian child, rushing past her, flew back into the sitting-room, and clung, with all the strength sorrow and apprehension united could bring into action, round her mother's prostrate figure.

Manetta, satisfied by the fear-enforced promise from her little charge, descended to the kitchen with a somewhat more elastic step than the one with which her master's bidding had been fulfilled a few moments previously.

"What is your will, Manetta, and why make all this disturbance just as a poor fellow is about to enjoy a hardly-earned meal," inquired an aggrieved voice, as, in answer to her reiterated summons of "Paolo—Paolo ! you idle rogue,

where are you?" the individual thus abruptly invoked condescended to make his appearance.

"Hardly earned, indeed, you good-for-nothing one. If thy dinner be hardly earned this morning, what must Manetta's be, forsooth! She, however, having small relish for labour while other folks rest, has work in hand for thee, —ay, and before dinner too. Come now, none of those grimaces, Paolo; you'll return with all the better appetite!" and her directions to seek for and bring back with him the nearest physician were hastily delivered.

"This all comes of living with an English signore," grumbled Paolo. "An Italian master would know better than to send a poor wretch out in the burning sun. It is next to murder—only think of one's head. Can you not remonstrate with the signore, good Manetta? Tell him it is impossible at this moment; by-and-by it will be cooler."

"Something worse than a hot walk awaits thee, lazy one, if thou tarriest another moment. It is not your master who sends you, remember; it is Manetta."

"Ah! that alters the case entirely," answered the page, rising gallantly. "To wait on handsome Manetta is never a trouble. No sun too scorching to encounter for her sake."

"A truce to your compliments, Paolo!" was the girl's prompt reply. "They are wasted on one who has already learnt their value. Come, start; and the sooner you return, so many more ribbons and bonbons for the carnival next week. Is there no other Italian girl Paolo deems as handsome, if not even handsomer, than Manetta? No one else who listens to Paolo's pretty speeches! and, better still, believes them TRUE!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the accused, as he scampered off. "You're as clever as a witch, and almost as wicked!" ejaculated the Italian, *sotto voce*, as he reached the garden gate.

"Can you give me an idea as to what has caused your mistress's sudden illness?" was the physician's first inquiry, after a rapid glance at his patient.

"It is not sudden by any means," was the unhesitating reply. "She has been ailing these six months past, and more; but could not be persuaded to seek advice, having an unfortunate prejudice against gentlemen of your profession, signore. This morning, in crossing the room to ring the bell, the signora's foot slipped, partly, no doubt, from weakness, and she fell against that couch wounding her poor forehead sadly. See, here is the mark!"

Lucia, at these words, looked up from her mother's pillow, where her little face had been hidden since the doctor's entrance. For the first time in her short life, guarded and shielded from approach of evil beneath the shelter of that mother's watchful tenderness, a falsehood, at once bold and deliberate, had reached her ear. The maid looked threateningly towards her.

"Is it not so, Signorina Lucia?" she inquired, as the doctor's eye caught that of the child. "For I was not in the room, signore, when the accident happened. Tell the gentleman, signorina. Did not your mamma fall down here by the couch?"

"Yes; she fell down here, Manetta. I ran across the room to try and catch her; but it was too late."

"Whereabouts did her head strike, my little one?" continued the physician. "It must have been a tremendous blow to have left this mark behind." But no answer came; the child's face was more hidden in the pillow.

"She is scared to death, signore," whispered the waiting-woman; "her love for her mother—my poor lady there—is something quite past belief."

"*Povero piccolo!*" ejaculated the physician, in a tone of tender commiseration, as, desiring Manetta to raise the

sleeve of her lady's dress, he applied the lancet to her round white arm, drawing a sigh of relief and surprise, as after a few seconds the blood began to trickle slowly, very slowly down, and his patient, opening her eyes, looked wildly around, pronouncing Lucia's name, whose joy at finding her dead mamma restored to life again, could find expression in nothing but increased sobbing, mingled with suppressed laughter, almost more painful to listen to. The kind physician, after first lifting and then laying the child by her mother's side, desiring neither to speak, but to try, if possible, to obtain a little sleep, took Manetta aside, and made her clearly understand that her mistress's restoration to life was but temporary, and would in all probability last but a few hours longer; he had done his utmost, but the blow she had sustained in falling was too near the brain for ultimate recovery, besides which, her health from some cause or other, was evidently already shattered. She would not under any circumstances have lived another year. He desired that her friends should at once be informed of the signora's danger and of his opinion.

"I will let my master know the very moment he returns home, signore!" was the apparently saddened answer; "he has been out for hours, and knows nothing whatever of this terrible accident."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the doctor in the same compassionate tone used before, in speaking of Lucia. "It will, indeed, be sorrowful news wherewith to greet his return; but these things will happen. Oh, life is but a spider's web, maiden; no lack of time between morning and noonday to scatter it from the wall out into the unknown world beyond. But I cannot linger now; there is another case requiring immediate attention. I shall, of course, pay another visit in the course of the day; though my skill, alas! is useless here, except to alleviate suffering. She is very

young to die, and some would say far too beautiful. Do not let that child be excited, or, at all events, as little as possible ;” and after a few more necessary instructions to his listener the physician departed. Manetta accompanied him to the door, and on her return met Lucia coming towards her with the intelligence that her mamma wished to see a priest. “ Will you, dear Manetta, go in search of one ?” was the whispered, timid inquiry.

“ Not I, indeed !” replied the maid ; “ where’s the use of it ? The signora is quite good enough without, and let master happen to come home and find a priest here, neither he nor any one else in the house but would wish himself a hundred miles away from it. So don’t expect me to set out on such an errand, signorina,—or Paolo either, he likes his place too well.”

“ Then, I will go myself,” cried Lucia. “ I know my way to the church of La Sposa, and the Fathers are sure to be in their confessionals, to-day being the eve of the Assumption. Please, dear Manetta, let me ; if you were ill or any one else, and wanted a priest, I would go and fetch him for you,” throwing her arms caressingly around the servant’s neck.

“ There—there, that will do, child ;” and the little arms were hastily, but not roughly disengaged. “ For Heaven’s sake, find some one more worth kissing than Manetta. Well would it be were you never taught to be less innocent and foolish, with all your naughty, passionate ways, than you are now. There, go back to your mamma, and tell her I’m gone for Father Ignatius, the superior of St. Marco’s. He knows neither Manetta nor her history,” thought the girl, as, with a downcast expression, she quitted the child. “ So much the better ; he may think her a saint for fetching him here at risk of her life, almost, if it suit the good Father’s fancy. *Veramente*, we are neither better nor

worse for what others please to think of us, saint or sinner. The world is easily deceived ; not even a priest can read one's heart, if one has a mind to disguise it."

Father Ignatius came and went, and so likewise did the long hours of that bright summer afternoon. They came like shadows, and departed as silently. At sunset, the *Angelus* rang out from church and convent. Shortly afterwards, Paolo came up stairs to inform Manetta of her master's return home, and his wish to see her.

"Tell him I am busy, but will come presently," was the reply ; and in the course of ten minutes she obeyed the summons. Her entrance was hailed with a smile of satisfaction, as her master pointed to a chair, and bidding her be seated, inquired whether matters were all right as usual again.

"You really deserve better wages than you now receive, my good Manetta," he continued, without waiting her reply. "I have long thought so, and I have also long thought of raising them. A girl with your prudence and discretion should be regarded more in the light of a friend than a dependant. Let the salary you now receive be doubled from this day forth."

"*Grazie, 'signore,*" was the cool and most indifferent reply, no longer accompanied, however, by the bold smile of the morning. There was a look of indignation, mingled with something approaching to sadness, on her brow.

"And that most irritating of all irritating children, Manetta—did you, to the letter, follow my advice respecting her ? And your mistress, is she *quite* recovered ?"

The last words were uttered in a would-be careless tone. The woman folded her arms, and looked fixedly across the room.

"*Sì, signore,*" she quietly replied.

"Ha ! that's all right, then—you are a clever girl, Manetta. To tell you the plain truth, your mistress chooses

at times to aggravate me beyond endurance. I care little for passionate women—it is turn for turn with them ; but the way your mistress has of speaking, especially when refusing, as she continually does, to comply with my smallest request, is too much for my patience. You are a wild, passionate girl yourself, Manetta, almost as passionate as handsome. You will understand what I mean—and so she is really better, in spite of—in spite of that fall this morning; that stupid fainting-fit I was obliged to leave her in so unfortunately.”

“ Yes, signore, she is fast asleep, and much better—far better than either you or I am ever likely to be in this world, or the next. She is *quite well*.”

“ What mean you, Manetta ? ” exclaimed her master, looking up in strange surprise, more at the tone in which the last sentence was spoken than at the words themselves.

Manetta rose and advanced a few paces nearer. “ Do you believe in another world, my English master,” she inquired, slightly raising her voice ; “ a better world than this ? ”

“ About as much as you do, Manetta, I suppose. How much may that be ? You used to be well up in these theological questions a few years ago.”

“ A few years ago is not to-day, signore ; would that it were ! But this I do know, that if there be such a place as paradise, the Signora Madlena has just entered there.”

“ You don’t mean to tell me, girl, that she is *dead* ! ” exclaimed the young Englishman, springing to his feet, and striking the table in his agitation.

“ Even so,” was the calm reply ; “ she died an hour ago, as the bells were ringing the *Angelus*, and the nuns chanting their *Ave Maria*. The songs of the Church and her soul were wafted into heaven together—if, as I was saying, there

be such a place as heaven, which you and I, signore, consider doubtful."

A look of dark, unavailing remorse passed across the young man's countenance. It was not penitence—no, nor anything approaching that blessed name. There was a long pause, broken by Manetta.

"I must go up stairs again, and sit beside that poor child; it is growing dark, and she will be thinking about the Black Lady. Wretch that I was to frighten her with that old story this morning!"

"Stop a minute first, and tell me more about this; I am inexpressibly shocked. Why inform me of it in that sudden, heartless manner! Did no doctor see her?"

"He did."

"Oh, that is well. And what said he?—they have always plenty to say, those gentlemen of life and death, especially when there is nothing to be done."

"He said, signore, that my mistress was dying from the effect of a blow on the temple, which I told him she had received from falling against the foot of that couch up stairs in a fainting-fit."

"Ah! the child—what said Lucia?"—the words were brought out hurriedly.

"Oh, I terrified her, not without some considerable difficulty, into the same story, or something very like it. The doctor, at all events, was satisfied by her silence, if nothing else."

"Manetta," said the gentleman, extending his hand,—
"you have saved my life. The least I can do is to free you from care or poverty. Name your sum; be it what you will, it is your own."

With a stifled shriek she withdrew her hand from his grasp, and then struck it fiercely on the table. "Listen, now, my young English master," she vociferated with wild

passion ;—" I am a poor ignorant, degraded Italian girl, with nothing to look forward to either in this world or the next ; for the peace of an innocent conscience has departed, and you and others have laughed me out of a belief in pardon here, or recovered happiness hereafter ; your wretched money has bribed me hitherto, but to-day's work has been a trifle too much even for me, and sooner than touch one scudo more of your accursed money, I would die in the streets starving for a crust of bread at your very door !"

" What is it you dare to insinuate, girl, by speaking thus ? Do you mean to tell me to my face that I intended to—to—that I intended this to have happened ? "

" No, I do not. If I did, neither fear of past, present, nor future should hinder me from denouncing you as a villain and a murderer, till all Florence, and even your own country too, rang with the tale. I would make the truth known now (a base enough one even for this bad world) would it be of any avail to that pale corpse up there ; for not only did a harsh word towards me never fall from her lips, spite of my ill temper and impudence, but more than that, she often tried to save the soul others have sought hard to destroy. Her advice was turned into ridicule, and would be again, very likely, were she here to offer it ; though I'm sorry at this moment, like others at the deathbed of those to whom they have turned a scornful ear. For her sake I would make the whole story a public one, signore ; but it would do no good to her now, and would but serve to injure the only creature who really loved her—that poor little one. To let her grow up with such a tale attached to her father's name, would indeed be a heartless cruelty. No need to make the innocent suffer for the guilty more than this wise, just world already makes them suffer."

" But I repeat to you, Manetta—are you mad, girl, to

talk in this way?—that I never for one moment intended this to happen. How dare you continue these reproaches? Do you know, or have you forgotten, whom you are addressing?”

“Forgotten? No, you are not easily forgotten, signore, little fear of that; and as to *daring*,” she pointed to the ceiling, “the less you talk on that subject to Manetta the better. She dare say anything she has a mind to; ay, and do anything for all that, now the power is her own. So you really did not intend actually and deliberately to imbrue your hands in her blood! Granted, signore. It was *wonderfully* forbearing, deserving more praise than one knows how to bestow. Yet, listen to me. Conscience may let you off on easy terms; but not so, Manetta. She has a word or two of truth to say ere she quit your house for ever. There is many a poor wretch found guilty of murder, and for ever banished human society, even if not brought to the gallows, for a deed done during a momentary fit of passion, and under circumstances of awful provocation, who is far less steeped in crime than yourself. Have you not tortured a fellow-creature’s very life out—let alone her being your wife? Have you not, for these years past, neglected her through many and many an illness brought on by your ill-usage, and which had like to have been her death? Have you not insulted her by the constant presence of those her holy and innocent eyes ought never to have gazed upon? Is this the first blow it has been her lot to receive from that hand—though, fortunately for *it* and unfortunately for *her*, the fatal one was deferred till this morning, and then given by a happy chance? *Via, via!* don’t think to frighten me with those glaring eyes! Sit down, and listen till I conclude; and learn for the first time in your life, if you have never learnt it before, that neither man, woman, nor child is ever afraid of that which

they despise; and one stands here, proud Englishman, who has learnt to despise, more than the worm under her feet, both you and your riches. I ask again, what had she done to provoke it? What was her crime, except that of being the most gentle and uncomplaining of human creatures, and yet brave enough to speak the truth on seeing you run headlong into ruin?"

"She was so horribly religious," he muttered, as though in excuse. "You know how I detest religion: besides it is utterly useless to look back upon the past; it cannot be undone."

"No," assented the young Italian woman. "You are right there, signore. Would to Heaven that it could! Surely, half the world would give all they possess to undo their past, if possible. I have but one thing more to say, signore, and it is this—My future silence depends altogether upon yourself. It must depend entirely on your treatment of that little one. Treat her as you treated her mother, and go where you will, sooner or later you will find, to your cost, that Manetta is not always so ready at inventing falsehoods as she has been fool enough to prove herself this morning."

"Hush, girl—hush! what is it you would have me to do with the child. I am ready to fall in with any plan you may suggest. She must be educated, you know; that is the first difficulty."

"Not at all! Let her go as pensioner to the convent of the Annunziate, where she is now only a daily pupil. The nuns are much attached to the child, and she to them; and every one speaks highly of the school. Let her remain there until she has grown up, and then——"

"Oh then, Manetta, she can come to England and keep my house, until she becomes mistress of another. It is a capital idea of yours; the very best possible," added the

gentleman with an accent of considerable relief at the turn their conversation had taken.

"And then as to the future you need not distress yourself. Lucia's dowry will be a tempting one. There will be little difficulty in her forming the highest connections."

"True," replied the waiting-woman, preparing to depart; "and if she is a wise signorina, she will choose for her companion through life just such another English gentleman as her dear papa. Ha! ha! how enviable will be her fate. Who with such a prospect before her would not be the present motherless, heart-broken little signorina. *Buona notte, signore,—buona notte;*" and bowing her head with mock respect, Manetta quitted, with the firm determination of never again re-entering, her master's apartment.

CHAPTER II.

“ They grew in beauty, side by side,
They fill’d one home with glee.”

GRAVES OF A HOUSEHOLD.

“ MAY, dear, the choir-children are waiting for you in the garden. I found them going into the church as usual, for their singing-lesson; but thinking you would rather have them here to-day, I have marshalled the youthful company into the garden, with full permission to gather as many strawberries as they can manage to eat till you are ready for them.”

“ Thank you a thousand times, dearest Arthur; you are always so thoughtful. It will be a hard matter to get through the singing-lesson at all; but it does not seem right to give it up on that account, and besides, I wish to help good Father Paul to the last moment. I fear he will miss us all sadly, especially just now, when this fresh persecution has been raised against the Church. How thankful I shall be when you are able to return here as one of her priests, to help to fight her glorious battles. The thought of this takes away half my sorrow in leaving our dear home.”

Arthur’s only answer was a deep sigh, as he passed his hand fondly over his sister’s head, who, fearing to keep her scholars waiting, was gathering up her work, and preparing to depart.

It was arranged, however, before the brother and sister separated, that after the children’s dismissal a long walk should be their evening recreation, Arthur observing, in a low and almost trembling voice, that he had business of great importance to consult May upon.

We will take advantage of her absence to cast a glance over the circumstances which led to the foregoing conversation. Arthur and May were the elder son and daughter of the late Mr. Templeton, a gentleman always supposed to have been the possessor of immense wealth, acquired in early life by the steady application of unusual talent to the profession he had been educated to embrace. After a long and brilliant career at the English bar, he had, fifteen years ere our tale commences, retired from the arduous duties of public life, and had, in the society of his wife and children, in the constant enjoyment of some of the most lovely scenery England can boast of, and in the possession of every luxury a refined taste and elegant mind could suggest, spent more years of uninterrupted happiness than often falls to the lot of those who have to travel along life's shadowed pathway. Mr. Templeton, however, was not one of those who could be satisfied with the mere externals of enjoyment. His proud and independent spirit had taken a higher flight, and aimed for long—long years at that which, to men of his character, so often appears unattainable, until at last it found rest, where alone such a spirit could find rest, in the grasp of truth and reality. He became a Catholic, and his first act upon settling at Haseldyne was to build and richly endow a magnificent church, in which not only his own children might be trained up to the adoration of their Creator, but where also the poor and desolate, from the densely-populated and neglected neighbourhood around his home might enjoy the same blessing.

Deep and earnest was the grief of many, who had often blessed the day when Mr. Templeton came among them, when, about two years previous to the commencement of our tale, his health began gradually but visibly to decline, without any apparent cause, for he was still in the prime of life; and the skilful physicians, who, one after the other,

were consulted, could assign no reason for the change, unless some mental anxiety, weighing upon a naturally oversensitive temperament, lay hidden beneath the calm and dignified exterior, always a marked characteristic of Mr. Templeton's conduct under every circumstance. This surmise was found, alas ! but too correct, when, a few weeks before poor Mr. Templeton's death, he received letters from abroad, the effect of which brought on an attack of increased suffering of such alarming nature as threatened for some days to destroy the use of memory, if not of reason itself, altogether ; but the prayers continually offered up from the altar of that church he had so dearly loved were heard and answered. Contrary to the expectations and prophecies of the medical men in attendance, he entirely recovered the light of that once brilliant intellect permitted for a while to be darkened and overclouded, as if in loving preparation for its summons into the full blaze of eternal day, even as when about to present a dazzling sight to the gaze of children, we darken the room beforehand to enhance the brightness of the coming vision. The first use Mr. Templeton made of recovered reason was, to lay the whole state of his affairs before his wife, from whom he had, in mistaken tenderness, carefully concealed the difficulties he was placed under, in the vain hope that all might be ultimately adjusted without her knowledge.

Mrs. Templeton received with her usual sweetness the news which, half choked with agitation, her dying husband informed her had been the cause of his long illness. It appeared that, in the hope of increasing his income, and thus adding to his children's future comfort and independence, he had been induced to follow the example of too many others, and had some time since embarked almost the whole of his property in a speculation which for some years had fully realized his most sanguine hopes ; but that during the last

year or two, the greatest doubts had arisen in his mind as to the wisdom of the step he had taken. The agony of suspense, and the knowledge of all that hung upon the issue of events ere he could recover at least some of the money he had so unwisely invested, had by degrees shattered his health, until, on receipt of the before-named letters confirming his worst fears, he had sunk altogether. In vain did his wife and children assure him that the loss of their property was as dross compared with the value of his life, his presence among them. In vain did they picture, in the most glowing colours love could invent, the happiness of their all working together for a subsistence which would be but the more prized from having been hardly earned. Fully aware of how much depended on his recovery, and of the power his personal exertions would once more exercise in setting them beyond the reach of poverty, the poor man struggled hard for life; but its slender thread had been too rudely jarred, and in another week or two Mr. Templeton laid down for ever the heavy and bitter cross of this world's anxieties, and gained the land where it is so "easily forgotten how things here are awarded."

His wife and children must now meet the storm alone, and face it as best they may. Mrs. Templeton, a clever and highly accomplished woman, had from their earliest childhood superintended the education of her two daughters, May and Rachel, assisted in one portion of it, which the world and she differed in considering the more essential, by Mr. Leslie, more familiarly known by the title of Father Paul, to whose care from the commencement had been committed the spiritual welfare of the mission in Haseldyne parish, and who, not being merely a first-rate theologian and a devoted shepherd of souls, but also a very intellectual and agreeable person, had come, ere many months of his stay had elapsed at Haseldyne, to be considered no mean

addition to the society, whether Protestant or Catholic, of the surrounding neighbourhood. Arthur Stapleton, the eldest of the family, was on the point of joining one of the Catholic colleges, with the intention of studying for the priesthood, when the news of his father's illness recalled him to Haseldyne, where he soon found not only the angel of decay silently pointing to the deathbed of one dearer to him than aught else in life, but the stern messenger of disappointment also, bidding him relinquish for ever the long and tenderly-cherished hope of his boyhood and early youth, the blessed vocation so longed for and sought after with earnest prayer, and never save for one moment abandoned, spite of the dazzling temptations which wealth, position, and other less worldly, though far more alluring attractions, had held before the young man's eyes. Through all these, and it may be through more than these, had Arthur Templeton "borne aloft the banner with the strange device 'Excelsior!'" Once and only once, in a moment of weakness, or when the sunshine fell with too brilliant radiance on one of the hill-side flowers as he ascended the mountain, had the young traveller paused, and stooped to gaze into its pure and innocent loveliness, wondering what sin there would be in gathering it and placing it in his bosom. Surely its fragrance would aid rather than retard his ascent; but the banner trembled in his grasp—the word desertion rang in his ear—and once more sounding his watchword, he began with paler face to ascend the mountain, while some other hand gathered the fair blossom. And now, after all had been overcome, and the threshold just gained, he must turn back, and, at the call of duty, re-enter the world he had thus manfully renounced; for, after a careful examination into his father's affairs, it became but too evident how positive a necessity existed for Arthur's seeking some secular employment in which he might assist in the main-

tenance of his mother and sisters ; the education also of his younger brother Algernon, now only a child, would be a future cause of pecuniary anxiety. As soon, therefore, as the last honours had been rendered to his father's memory, and long ere the sad though peaceful *requiem* with which they laid him down to rest had ceased to thrill through his aching heart, Arthur set himself to work, rousing every energy to obtain, let the attempt cost what it might, the necessary employment. Nor had he to seek long in vain, as we shall quickly see.

But it is now time to return to May. She had at length dismissed her scholars after an unusually heavy singing-lesson ; for the children one and all were inspired with a secret presentiment that it would probably be the last lesson, or something very near approaching the last they would ever receive again from their kind and gentle mistress. She was now quite prepared to set out for the promised walk with her brother.

CHAPTER III.

"And watch with firm, unshrinking eye,
Thy darling visions as they fly."—KEBLE.

"How lovely the village looks this evening," was May's first observation, after a full ten minutes' unbroken silence on both sides. "I suppose it is because we are about to leave Haseldyne, that I never till now seemed to realize half its beauty."

Arthur smilingly challenged her to solve the problem—it was an old amusement of his to draw May "out of her shell," as he called it, she being naturally rather over-reserved, and in consequence considered by the greater part of her friends, and even nearer relatives, very unget-at-able, to use the mildest term then applied to this somewhat rare imperfection.

"No, indeed, Mr. Arthur," replied May, in the same gay tone, "do not labour under the delusion, or the very smallest expectation of being edified by my romance this evening. That pale face of yours looks quite poetical enough already, and I feel in consequence, inclined to be more than usually wise, dull, and matter of fact."

"As a punishment, then, for your obstinacy," said Arthur, "I will read your thoughts aloud;" and trying to imitate her voice, he began: "Why does everything around look so lovely to-night? Why do the birds' songs thrill more sweetly than of old? Why do the children's voices in the distance sound like music on the wind? What is it makes the trees whisper as they never whispered till now, and the very plants quiver with melody? Why does the sky shine

down upon us with a sweeter smile than it did six months ago, and everything above, beneath, and around seems as if overflowing with gladness and holiest beauty? Why does the church——”

“Stop, dear Arthur,” gently interrupted his sister, surprised no less than pained by the tone of excitement in which the last words were uttered; she had never observed Arthur thus give way to overwrought feeling before, and felt much regret for having broached the subject; “let us talk of something else.”

“No, May! it is better to face these thoughts at once and conquer them; it is useless endeavouring to seek relief from sorrow by drinking from its contemplation. No wonder everything around looks doubly beautiful when we are leaving them for ever. They say that even captives are wont to cast a lingering glance of affection on the cells in which they have been for many years prisoners, ere they depart to their long-looked-for freedom. The autumn flowers are ever the fairest—the last rays of the sunset the most endearing; and, to use a less poetical simile, one often begins to find out even disagreeable people’s good qualities when about to wish them a life-long farewell.”

“Yes,” replied May, “and this is the only explanation, to my mind, of what till lately has been a great difficulty to me in visiting the sick or the dying; of course, there are some exceptions, but as a rule, however wretched and poor and unhappy they have been in this world, they all cling to it at last—but now, Arthur, what can this important subject be on which I am to have the honour of being consulted? The idea of a poor weak woman, under twenty years of age, offering advice to a future priest and religious, quite frightens me.”

It was well for May that she did not see Arthur’s face at that moment, or she would quickly have recalled her words.

Wholly unconscious of the pain inflicted, and wishing to enter on the subject always such a theme of interest to Arthur, she continued asking question after question, till at last quite perplexed by his apparent indifference to her inquiries, she exclaimed quickly, "Really, Arthur, I shall begin to doubt your vocation presently. A priest, and above all a religious, ought to be one of the happiest creatures this weary world of ours can boast of,—at least, I always thought so; but either it is my mistake, or you are thinking of founding a new order, and wondering whether it will become necessary for you in this case ever to favour with a civil answer any unfortunate secular who may presume to address you."

"Hush, hush! May," cried Arthur, unable to bear her playful raillery any longer. "I am going to be neither a priest nor religious, I have other work to do;—but see, the sun is about to set. Let us run up this hill, and we shall be just in time to wish it good night;" and seizing her hand, they hurried up with such rapidity, that May had scarcely time to think over, much less to speak of, the news she had so little expected to hear, and would herself hardly yet believe in. On arriving at the summit, however, and before she had time to recover her breath, Arthur, thankful to have broken the ice at last, proceeded, hurrying out the words one after the other in a manner quite unusual with him. "Yes, May, it is quite true. I know you will be sorry, and I kept it from you as long as possible. But it is useless to conceal it any longer, and I want to consult you about a letter I received this morning from Lord Grosvenor—St. Clair's friend, you know,—offering me an excellent appointment in India, one which would in a few years enable me to support all you dear ones at home: and it is so difficult nowadays to do much in England. I would not decide about it, however, till I had consulted

you, my little May; for your judgment is worth more, in my opinion, than that of all the rest of my friends united."

Poor May! her face had become paler and paler at every word Arthur uttered. The ground seemed to tremble under her feet, and the trees to dance in circles. But she replied calmly, "Let us sit down a minute, and think over it. Go on talking, Arthur; let me hear more of the details."

Arthur felt pained. He little thought May would have spoken so coldly, when his own heart was half breaking at the idea of such a separation from all most dear to him on earth! But he went on telling her all the particulars of the said appointment, offered to him through the kindness of his college friend, Lord St. Clair, and how it was a thing thousands would jump at, and quite beyond his most sanguine expectations. And May sat listening quietly, her large dark eyes watching the sun setting behind the hills in the distance, and the white clouds tinged with pink, as they floated quickly over the blue sky, and then seemed to rest awhile, as though in reverence, above the churchyard where her father lay sleeping—so still, so peaceful, so sorrowless,—her heart aching with the effort for self-control and calmness. It would have been unspeakable relief to her to have laid her head on Arthur's shoulder and wept! It would have eased the throbbing of her temples,—but when did May seek relief for herself at the risk of paining others? Arthur should not see what she was suffering—he would have enough to bear, poor fellow, without that, and she would help him through it by her calmness. And yet Arthur was wondering meanwhile what could possibly make her thus cold and apathetic. More than once, when he left off speaking, May begged him to go on—let her hear everything, thus gaining a few minutes for composure. Arthur, her almost idolized brother—the image of their dead father, going from them for ever—ever—ever! A

sort of mocking echo from within kept repeating the words. "No," whispered May, trying to smother it—but in vain; the voice again reiterated the words with deeper emphasis than before, and would not be silenced—"for ever—ever!" She covered her face with her hand, and murmured a few words of prayer, and the echo departed while the sought-for calmness fell at length on her wearied spirit.

"Well, Arthur," she said, taking his hand fondly within her own, "it seems quite providential from all you say. The next thing to be done is to break it as gently as we can to mamma and Rachel."

"But that is the point on which I most want to consult you, May. Is it right, think you, to give my poor mother such additional pain, especially just now?—and yet even a few weeks' delay is impracticable, if I am to accept the appointment. The decision must be made at once."

"I am in hopes she will look on the bright side of things, Arthur; I know the uncertainty of our future prospects is a terrible cause of anxiety to her, and perhaps, now we are all breaking up home, it will be less felt than under happier circumstances. But as to yourself, dearest Arthur," continued his sister, "no words can express how deeply I feel for your disappointment in having to resign your long-cherished hopes. God grant some day you may be able to return to us, and once more——"

"Better not to think of it, May; *that* trial has been met and conquered long ago. I confess it was almost beyond me at first till something Father Paul said, one day after I had been wasting his time for a good two hours in useless grumbling on my hard fate, as I was more than half inclined to call it, completely restored my drooping spirits."

"Is it anything you are allowed to repeat to me?" asked his sister.

"Oh yes,—it was but a word or two; he put his hand on

my shoulder as we were parting, and said with a look I shall never forget to my dying day : ' There is one thing, my son, of more value even than a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life, without which martyrdom itself would be a worthless sacrifice. It is union with the will of God. Seek after that in your foreign home ! Obtain it, and you will have fulfilled your destiny — you will have added one ray more to the glory which surrounds *His* throne on high ; what saint need ask for aught beside ? ' "

The young man's eyes filled with tears, and his voice faltered as he concluded. They returned silently homewards, for the evening was drawing to a close. Little Algernon Templeton, the pet of the family, met them at the garden-gate, exclaiming that mamma and Rachel had been waiting this half-hour.

May ran up stairs, bathed her face hastily with cold water, and came into the drawing-room looking as fresh and happy as if nothing had happened. She sang to her mother, and amused them all with some village tale, told in her usual bright, sparkling manner. It was only on going into her mother's room for her last kiss that Mrs. Templeton remarked how her child's cheeks were burning, and feared she had been over-working herself.

" Oh no," said May, " it is only a slight headache. A night's rest will set all to rights." She passed, however, an almost sleepless one, haunted by sad dreams of the future, in which Arthur was ever the principal actor.

The following morning May invited Rachel into Mrs. Templeton's room, who since her husband's death had become quite an invalid, and seldom left it until noon. Here she drew so bright a picture of Arthur's new prospects, and built such airy castles of his return in a few years, that the rest caught the infection of her hopefulness; and if the sorrow of the coming separation could not be

removed, it was at least softened, shielded by her influence. Arthur, who had contemplated his mother's grief with inward shrinking, was inexpressibly relieved to find, on paying her a visit after breakfast, how bright a view she took of the matter, and how cheerfully she talked of looking forward to his not far distant return to England. He immediately wrote to London, accepting the appointment, and received a letter by return of post, desiring him to be at Southampton within a fortnight.

This, May declared, was the best possible arrangement, as they would all be removing the week following, and therefore have little time to spare for tears; and when Arthur came to her, full of regrets at not being able to assist in the removal, she assured him, laughingly, he would only have been in the way, and that women can manage packing, travelling, and railway-porters and baggage, and all that sort of thing, much better than men, if the latter would only be persuaded to believe it.

That fortnight was hard work for her. On one hand to drive back the rebellious tears continually rising in unbidden drops from the loving yet self-forgetful heart beneath, on the other to keep up every one else's spirits, Arthur's included—this was her daily task; and who but would have said it was well done? Arthur alone fully understood it all; and though her manner that first evening had surprised him, he now saw through it, and in consequence loved and appreciated his young sister more than ever.

Rachel, poor child, had not yet acquired the same, or anything like the same power of self-control. Two years younger than May, and with a disposition at once affectionate, demonstrative, and over-excitable, she suffered acutely at the least approach of sorrow, either to herself or others; and any long attempt at concealment seemed beyond her strength, physical or mental. This disposition

had in her childhood been the cause of much anxiety, and had not a little interfered with her education, — a fit of nervous weeping and headache, if not a day's illness, being the frequent result of a severe word spoken to herself, or at the sight of any punishment inflicted on the other children. Sunshine and happiness appeared the only atmosphere in which Rachel was formed to exist.

“How will she struggle with the future?” was May's frequent question, as she gazed on the sunny, childish face so often pressed to her lips as it lay on the pillow by her side, for May loved Rachel with even more than a sister's affection, and watched over her with the deep tenderness not unfrequently displayed by strong and reserved natures towards the weak and unstable. She would have sacrificed anything for Rachel's happiness, who in return clung to her with a reverential love, and poured out, with childlike truthfulness, every joy as well as sorrow into her bosom.

CHAPTER IV.

“Th’ ancestral homes of England,
How beautiful they stand.”—HEMANS.

A DAY or two before Arthur's departure, it was arranged for May and himself to pay two or three farewell calls together, delayed purposely, as most heartfelt leavetakings generally are, to the last moment. Their first visit was to Haseldyne Park, the seat of the Earl and Countess of Morley, their nearest neighbours. Lord St. Clair and Lady Adelaide, the children of the earl by his first marriage, were about the same age as the elder branches of the Templeton family. Lord St. Clair and Arthur had been schoolfellows together, and Lady Adelaide the friend and companion of the two sisters. The first Countess of Morley, had died in giving birth to her second child; it was not until several years after her death, that the earl, greatly to the surprise of his fashionable friends, married the widow of a London banker, a lady of considerable property. The wish to rid himself of long-standing and heavy encumbrances on his estate, probably influencing his selection, more than other considerations; so, at least, did polite circles venture to account for his marriage. Mrs. Dashwood was certainly as complete a contrast to his former elegant wife, both in manner and appearance, as could well be imagined; neither was it in externals alone that the dissimilarity existed, as the sequel of their oft-discussed marriage proved.

Five aristocratic additions to the population of England filled in course of time the nursery of Haseldyne Park; and then the mother's dislike and absurd jealousy of her

husband's elder children soon became a source of continual misunderstanding between the Earl of Morley and his wife ; though the provocation could not with justice be often laid to the earl's charge, as, being naturally an indolent, easy-tempered man, he was quite content to let every one go their own way, if they would but allow him a similar privilege. And at last, wearied out and disgusted with these matrimonial disputes, he contrived to absent himself from home as much as possible. Since Lord St. Clair and his sister had come to years of discretion, things had brightened a little ; they both inherited their mother's refinement and generosity of character ; and the countess not being able to discover any just ground for complaint in their conduct towards either herself or her children, could do little more than grumble in private on the imaginary evils of which she chose to consider herself the victim, most devoutly hoping that, as everybody said Lord St. Clair was so exceedingly good and unlike all the rest of the world, he would like all dreadfully good people die young, and go to a better one ; thus leaving her little Augustus, the idol of her heart, heir to his father's estate. Lady Adelaide might live and flourish to a good old age, for all the countess cared, if she would but make haste and marry, and so leave herself and her children in undisturbed possession of Haseldyne Park. It was hinted by some of the good-natured people of the neighbourhood that since Lady Adelaide had been introduced into London society, she was becoming quite a young lady of the world, and would quickly forget her village friends and early associates, especially now the cold hand of poverty had encircled them in its icy embrace ; this fact, however, as the Templeton party observed, remained to be proved ; the charity which thinketh no evil being with them not so much a poetical maxim as a practical reality.

May and her brother have by this time reached the park,

distant from their own house about half a mile. They stood for some minutes conversing familiarly with the old people at the lodge gate, feasting their eyes meanwhile with the sight of the deer as they gambolled about, in and out of the shady trees in the distance, or stood with their graceful necks erect listening to some fancied sounds in the woods around ; now gathering in sudden groups as though for mutual protection, and then, as the fear was dispelled by the non-appearance of either friend or foe, rushing off in reckless gaiety to race one another over the green sward, reminding the spectators of nothing so much as the sound of children's joyous laughter, and almost as infectious as its gladness. The brother and sister sauntered down a well-known avenue leading by a circuitous path to the house. It had been a favourite racecourse for the children in days of yore, and recalled happy reminiscences at every step. May seemed determined not to linger over these, or to allow Arthur a moment's time to do so either. She changed the subject whenever he alluded to the past, and immediately began hurrying forwards, saying they would find no one at home unless they hastened onwards. One opening in the thick avenue led them to an extensive piece, or rather small lake, of water, supplied by a spring rising some miles from the village, and finding its way by an artificial descent of some feet, thus forming a pretty waterfall, into the earl's reservoir beyond, from whence the water again descended at the further extremity of the park, in the form of a still more picturesque cascade, into the humble, unfrequented stream of the neighbouring county. May took the path leading to this water as if by instinct. An arched stone bridge, built so as to allow a boat to pass underneath if necessary, led to the earl's "pleasure-grounds," as the poor people called them, beyond. They had hardly reached this bridge, when the splashing of oars broke upon their ears, mingled with the sound of a

man's voice singing, with much pathos, the words of an Italian song or hymn, it would be difficult to decide which.

"Hush!" whispered May, laying her finger on her lip; "do not let him see us—what fun it will be when he finds us listening!"

At this moment the boat glided slowly through one of the arches, while the rower shipped his oars as if inclined to rest, and continued his song, allowing the boat to take its own course, a permission the little bark did not seem fully to understand, as it swerved first from one side of the bank to the other, and then glided slowly down with the stream towards the row of horse-chestnuts in full blossom, beneath the shade of which May and Arthur stood concealed. The young boatman, whom our readers will already have guessed to be Lord St. Clair, would have passed by wholly unconscious of their vicinity, had not May, at her brother's instigation, suddenly joined in the last notes of the song, just arrived at conclusion; and they then broke out into a merry laugh, as Lord St. Clair, springing from his seat, seized the oars, and with two or three strokes reached their hiding-place.

"What a shameful trick!" he exclaimed, carefully handing May into the boat, and motioning Arthur to the stern. "I could have believed it of you, old fellow, easily enough, nodding to Arthur, but did not think May had so much mischief in her; it is very wrong of young ladies, in my opinion, to conceal their natural dispositions in the way they are so fond of doing; sooner or later they are certain to betray themselves and get into mischief."

"I hope, at all events, they may never feel more humiliated than I do at this moment," was the gay reply.

"There you are again, May!—not content with a want of humility in yourself, you must needs hope that others are

tainted with the same terrible impression. Now I appeal to you, Arthur, as the acknowledged model in Haseldyne of all that is perfect in human nature, whether this is not very wrong of your sister?"

"Almost as wrong as your running us aground, or upsetting us in the mud. Oh, here we go—that's right"—as the keel of the boat struck against a soft substance beneath the water, and then remained immovable.

"This comes of preaching instead of practising," was May's quiet reply to St. Clair's mock look of despair.

"Injustice and ingratitude at the same moment," said the young nobleman, folding his arms with an injured expression of countenance, and gazing into Arthur's face, whose merry laughter delighted May's heart to listen to, till a pang shot across that poor heart bidding it remember that soon that laughter must cease to ring by her side.

"There are you two," continued Lord St. Clair, "evidently accusing my innocent self of getting you into this dilemma, when any one with the smallest amount of justice would recollect it was the steersman's fault, and his alone, that caused this disaster, my part as rower being simply a mechanical one."

Arthur's only answer to this piteous address was to hold up the rudder—or rather, we should say, what had been the rudder—above his head.

"Ah!" said Lord St. Clair, joining in the laughter at the pitch of his voice. "I sit condemned. I forgot I had broken it the other day in chasing one of the old swans. I wish you had been here, Arthur; we had such a chase; they are just sitting, you know, and awfully furious. One of the white-necked ladies had the impudence to fly at me, because I ventured to be rowing a trifle nearer than usual to her domains; but I soon taught her better manners. Oh, here she comes again! I'll show her the mischief she was the

cause of;" and taking the broken rudder out of Arthur's hand, he threw it at the swan. The graceful bird changed her onward course, half in fright, half in anger, as the board struck the water near her, and, with ruffled feathers and swelling bosom, sailed rapidly towards the boat.

"Pray, don't provoke her," cried May, catching his arm. "Indeed, it is not safe; pray do not annoy her again."

"Not for the world, if it frightens you," said Lord St. Clair gently. "I only wanted you to see how grand she looks in a passion; but I have taught her who is master here, haven't I, snowy?" The bird looked threateningly at her interrogator, as she floated within a few yards of the boat, and, raising her wings, seemed half disposed to accept the challenge his words conveyed; but catching a glimpse of her fair white form reflected in the water, the thought perhaps suggested itself as to the wisdom of disturbing so much beauty for the sake of an improbable revenge; for wheeling suddenly round she departed, rejecting with disdain the pieces of bread and biscuit thrown by her enemy from the boat.

"How noble she looks!" exclaimed May, as the proud bird swept out of sight; "yet I never could feel one spark of affection for those beautiful creatures. They always appear to me capable of exciting any amount of admiration, but that is all. They never creep into one's heart like the robin and the nightingale."

"You would excite my unqualified admiration as well as affection, St. Clair," observed Arthur, repeating her last words in a solemn voice, "if you would point out to me any feasible way of escape from this land of mud, into which your lordship has had the kindness to convey us; for my own part, I feel greatly tempted to follow the example of that noble bird, and swim to land."

"You have just hit the right expedient, old fellow," rejoined

St. Clair; and, springing from his seat, he hastily threw off his cap and rowing-jacket, and prepared to step into the water. "I must get some of the men about to drag the boat with ropes, or we may stay here all night. But stop—I will give a call or two first; some one may be within hearing;" and raising his voice to trumpet-pitch, he shouted for some moments, but without attracting any notice, and was about to give up all hope of escaping a wetting, when the sound of horses' feet galloping towards the river arrested their attention.

"Do not be frightened, Adelaide," exclaimed the whole party in a breath, as, her hat thrown back, and hair streaming in confusion around her flushed and agitated face, the sister gained the bank.

"*Oh, St. Clair,*" was her first exclamation, "I thought you were drowning! How very wrong of you to terrify me in this manner! — papa would never have forgiven you! A joke is a joke all over the world, but this is going rather beyond it. May and Arthur too!—I should have thought you three together might have had more sense—to say nothing of heart—than to act in this way;" and half in real, half in feigned indignation, the speaker flourished her riding-whip towards the party.

"Upon my word, Adelaide," said her brother, "you are one of the coolest young ladies I ever had the honour of being acquainted with. Instead of pitying our forlorn situation, and trying, like a ministering angel, to alleviate our misfortunes, you stand upon the shore there, with the air of an avenging spirit, for having ventured to solicit your kindly assistance."

"Nonsense! St. Clair, it is no excuse whatever. You choose, with your usual carelessness, to run your boat aground, and then alarm the whole neighbourhood with your screams."

"I beg your pardon, Lady Adelaide," said St. Clair, with a face of extreme amusement, "but I never remember practising the accomplishment you allude to, since the time I was a pretty little boy in leading-strings."

"Well, screaming or screeching, or something—it is all alike; you made noise enough to nearly drive one out of one's mind: and if it were not for May, I would leave you and Arthur to get to shore in the best way you can. For her sake, however, I will send some of the men down;" and with these words the gay horsewoman rode off, indulging in a hearty laugh, as she gave a parting glance at the absurd position of the boat-party, who, ere half an hour had elapsed, found themselves, through her kind exertions, once more on *terra firma*.

"And now, May," said Lady Adelaide, drawing her friend's arm affectionately within her own, "the least you and Arthur can do to repay my devotion is, to stay and dine with us. I know your answer will be as usual, that you have dined three hours ago, and must positively return to tea; but as you are generally fond of exercising the virtue of self-denial—the one, by the way, I have the greatest aversion for—you had better not refuse so good an opportunity of carrying it into practice, and then St. Clair and myself will have the felicity of escorting you and Arthur part of the way home by moonlight. What a pity we are not all lovers, instead of common, matter-of-fact, every-day friends. It would be such an exquisite opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*, especially now we are all parting from each other—everybody going somewhere, and nobody, of course, expecting to meet again until some unheard-of disaster brings them once more together on the scene of action. To tell you the truth, May," continued her gay friend, in a lower key than before, "I really envy you and Arthur the life of independence and self-reliance I know you have both determined on leading.

I am sure riches and idleness don't go far to make one happy."

"I suppose by that last speech you intend to tempt me into one of my long discussions, as you always call them; on the inconsistencies of human nature," said May, smiling; "but for once you shall be pleasantly disappointed, as I want to talk to you before we part on at least twenty other more interesting subjects."

Lord St. Clair and Arthur meanwhile had set out for a long walk, saying they would leave the ladies to talk over their secrets, and should hope to meet them again at dinner-time.

The young Viscount St. Clair was one of those persons always so difficult to describe. Who has not felt the impossibility of conveying to others any adequate description of the very forms and faces the most vividly impressed on their own recollection? Ideal ones are far more easily created. They, indeed, at the bidding of imagination, appear and vanish at will; but the faces haunting our lives too often fade from view as we vainly attempt to delineate them on the frail canvas of memory. A profile, a faint outline, or at least the cold fidelity of a daguerreotyped resemblance, is all we are permitted to detain, as one by one the image of the dead or far away, pass swiftly before the dazzled brain and the loving heart.

Lord St. Clair's face was one of these. Painting and photograph of the future Earl of Morley were not wanting at Haseldyne Park; and yet, as Lady Adelaide observed, they bore no more resemblance to Lord St. Clair than the sign of the three brothers at the village inn. An expression at once gay and thoughtful — the intellectual gravity of the refined and highly-cultivated man, blended with the lingering simplicity of boyhood, might perchance have been considered by many the principal secret of its charm; but to

the few, and they were *very* few, who fully understood the character of the young nobleman, that face possessed a still deeper attraction,—it spoke of passions and impulses naturally wild and headstrong as the wind, sweeping round the forest in its giant strength, of a will capable of surmounting every obstacle, ay, and of bending others also in its steadfast course, subdued at the age of four-and-twenty to an unseen, unspoken-of, and yet perpetually-recognized system of unswerving obedience.

While yet a boy Lord St. Clair had embraced the Catholic faith, influenced, no doubt, by his early friendship with Arthur Templeton, a boy, like himself, of no common feeling and character. The Earl, his father, not thinking it worth while to interfere in a matter so little influencing his individual comfort, left the child to follow his own inclinations, merely claiming a promise that the subject should not be made one of future discussion in the family; the religious training of the rest being left to chance, and a weekly attendance at the parish church of Haseldyne. But enough, at present, of antecedents. The dinner-party passed off with less formality than usual, the countess being, for some reason or other, in one of her very best moods; she was, however, on the whole, always more or less condescendingly polite to the Templetons, May and Rachel in particular, their beauty and accomplishments being universally considered a charming addition to her circle. Had her own daughters been grown up, the case would probably have been otherwise; they, however, were as yet in the nursery; added to which, the Miss Templetons were great favourites with the little ones, and not unfrequently devoted an hour or two to their amusement.

The earl had as great a regard for the young ladies and their mother as he was capable of possessing for any one beside his own family, whom, if we must speak truly, was chiefly precious to him because they were the children of

the Earl of Morley. Mrs. Templeton, moreover, had been a friend of his first wife, a sentiment of regret and something like affection for whom lingered in the corner of his heart, prompting him at times to acts of consideration and kindness wholly at variance with his usual selfishness.

The evening glided merrily away. Soon after the moon rose, the Templetons took their departure, Lady Adelaide not forgetting her promise of accompanying them on the road home, attended by her brother.

"Now for the *tête-à-têtes*, May," exclaimed the giddy girl, as with a sister's freedom she took Arthur's arm, and led the way. "I have a great deal of good advice to give this lucky brother of yours before he depart 'o'er the blue mountains and the dark sea's foam ;' and if you, in return, will read St. Clair a parting lecture upon the enormity of so continually disturbing the peace of, and chasing those poor unhappy swans, endangering his life in that cockle-shell of a boat, and last, but by no means least, nearly exterminating the senses of the cherished sister of his affections, your time will be anything but spent in vain."

May laughed her reply to her ladyship's instructions ; but the laugh was changed into an involuntary sigh as the park gates closed behind them with a heavy clang. That sound seemed to ring the knell of their childhood's careless happiness. How merrily had they all played together beneath those trees over which the moon now smiled so sadly ! What peals of joyous laughter had rung along those sunlit paths, now cast into deepest gloom, as they left them in the distance silent and deserted !

Lord St. Clair did not appear either to think her silence strange or to venture for some moments upon breaking it, till at length, with an abruptness so unlike his general manner, that it startled May from her reverie, he began remarking on the beauty of the evening, saying it reminded

him in some unaccountable way of Mendelssohn's songs without words.

May thought the simile a happy one, and exerted herself to keep up the conversation. It had never before appeared difficult to talk to Lord St. Clair; but a deep oppression hung over her spirit, and the effort to combat it did but add to its weight. The figures of Adelaide and her brother, as they distanced their companions, grew indistinct and shadowy in the pale moonlight, and their merry laughter, as it was borne to her ear from time to time by the breeze, sounded to her excited fancy as the jeering of some cruel spirit mocking her grief at Arthur's approaching departure. Again the voice she had heard on the hill began to whisper the haunting prophecy, "For ever—ever!"

"No, no, no!" almost shrieked the girl, as she clasped her hands wildly in the air; "do not say 'for ever!'"

"May, dear, you are not well," exclaimed St. Clair. No one spoke. "You are tired and unstrung—it was selfish of us to keep you so late to-night." His voice was no longer abrupt, it had a depth of tenderness; but May observed nothing beyond his usual manner of speaking to her. She was accustomed to hear him speak tenderly, especially to any one in trouble.

"I am not the least overtired, thank you," she replied, her former calmness returning as she tried to smile through the tears which came to her relief. "I am very silly, but I was thinking of——"

"Oh, yes! I know all about it, May; you were thinking of dear Arthur. I have a piece of news to tell you on this subject which I think will please you. He and I are to be companions as far as Malta."

"No—you don't say so!" exclaimed his listener, looking up with a smile of surprised happiness. "How is it I never heard you were going abroad?"

"It is only on business for my father—I do not expect to be long absent; but was it not fortunate to occur just at this moment?—and I have been persuading Arthur to accompany me overland and meet his ship at Malta. It can easily be arranged with the authorities if we start at once. I propose going to town to-morrow to settle this business, but Arthur need not follow until the day after, or perhaps, even later, if we can arrange it."

"How very, very kind!" was the happy answer, as she smiled her thanks into St. Clair's face. "It will be so nice for dearest Arthur; and when you return we shall hear all about his journey, that is, if—if——"

"If what?" said the young nobleman, at a loss to understand her hesitation.

"Oh! I forgot," said May in the same embarrassed way; "we shall be in London, then, you know, and—and it will be so different; perhaps it would be better not. I mean, perhaps it would be better for you to write."

"Better not! Better for me to write! What *do* you mean, May; for I never before found you so unintelligible, often, as I must confess, you have puzzled me of late."

"Why," said May with much simplicity, "I only judge by what I have always heard of London society, and mamma says we ought not to be the least surprised or annoyed if you and Adelaide think it best not to call. You know we shall be almost entirely dependent on our own exertions, and must work like other people to earn our bread."

The blood sprang to the young man's brow, and he bit his lip; had any one else dared to insinuate what May had done, he would have answered with angry impetuosity, but there was a tone of childlike simplicity mingled with sadness in her voice which disarmed reproach.

"London society, in my opinion, is quite unendurable

enough already, pray don't make it worse," he replied with some quickness. "I hoped you were above these hollow conventionalities, hateful as they are."

"Nay!" said she smiling, "It is *you* who have to be above them, St. Clair. I have simply to submit, or rather, I should say, it is your family you ought to consult on the subject. You are Arthur's friend. You are young, impetuous, and noble-hearted, and your natural impulse would be to call upon us if we lived in St. Giles's; but you know, St. Clair," and her voice slightly trembled, "it is not *always* good to follow one's inclinations, is it, even when they point to generous and noble actions? Pray, forgive me," she continued smilingly, "for presuming to lecture you. I am always forgetting that we are no longer children, and you remember my propensity for preaching."

Lord St. Clair looked down upon the pure innocent face which from its earliest childhood had cast a holy influence—a magic spell over his life.

"You were ever my good fairy, May, I well remember," he replied, with winning softness; "nevertheless, for once, you must excuse my saying that I think your advice next to ridiculous, and should consider myself a fit subject for a strait jacket if I did not lecture you for it. The idea of consulting my family on matters my own heart and conscience can decide. Why, really, May, I wonder what you will suggest next! I thought better than this, I thought—I believed——" But ere the sentence was concluded, another destiny interposed. They had just reached the lane leading to the village, and Lady Adelaide, who the last five minutes had somewhat slackened the pace at which she usually walked, came suddenly to a stand-still, and with watch in one hand, and pocket-handkerchief in the other, stood waving them onwards, crying out in a mock pathetic voice, that their lady mother would break her own heart and

papa's into the bargain, if they did not return home immediately. She had no idea it was so late.

"Well, Arthur," said Lord St. Clair, "I shall try and arrange for us to meet at Folkestone, and what a glorious time we shall have together; I only wish these ladies could accompany us—but that would be almost too perfect."

"Farewell, Arthur; we shall hear of you very often, I hope; and you may depend upon my looking after your pretty sisters in London, and teaching them all the worldly wisdom they will need in that land of riches and honours," was Lady Adelaide's parting promise.

"Methinks, Addie, the less they learn of that far-famed wisdom the better, and so does Arthur, only he is too polite to contradict you."

"Not he, indeed. You would not think so if you had heard the impertinent remarks he has been making on my want of principle for the last three-quarters of an hour. I might as well have been sitting under good Friend What-is-his-name, at the Quaker's chapel down there. Well, the best people must part now and then, as thou art doubtless aware of, friend Templeton," continued Adelaide, trying to conceal any deeper or more painful feeling beneath these jesting words. "Peradventure, when thee and I meet again, friend Arthur, thou will find thy disedifying friend Adelaide a devoted daughter of the holy Catholic Church."

"I trust——" said Arthur Templeton, in an earnest whisper.

She turned quickly away, but came back to shake his hand with affectionate warmth; and then throwing her arms around May, and pressing a kiss upon her cold forehead, she ran down the lane calling St. Clair to follow her.

"God bless you, May," said Lord St. Clair, with deep feeling, as he took her hand for the last time. "I know

how much you must be suffering ;” and his voice became almost inaudible ; “ it is never absent from my thoughts—would to Heaven I could bear it in your stead !” and, afraid to trust himself with another word, he hurried after Lady Adelaide.

“ He is just the same noble-minded fellow as I always thought him when we were schoolfellows together,” was Arthur’s fond remark, as the young nobleman passed out of sight ; “ the world, at all events, has not spoiled *him*.”

“ It would be a clever world to do that,” May was about to reply ; but somehow the words refused to pass her lips, and she changed the observation into an inquiry as to the route he and Arthur proposed taking in their intended journey. Then brother and sister lingered some little time outside the shrubbery gate, as if loath to bring the day to a conclusion. It had been such a happy one, they mutually agreed, the boat adventure so amusing, and Lady Adelaide’s proceedings more than ever original and fascinating.

“ Dear Adelaide ! ” said Arthur, “ there is so much that is admirable in her character, if she would but cultivate it, or allow others to help her onwards. I feel sure, one of these days, she will be all we look forward to ; but, alas ! I fear that proud and wayward nature will be tamed and spiritualized only through suffering.”

“ Oh, Arthur, I trust not. Why think that ? She is brightness itself—just like our little Rachel, formed for flowers and sunshine. I could not bear to see either of them suffer.”

Arthur sighed. “ You would take their shares as well as your own, May, I suppose, if that were possible ; and in doing so, you would forget you were selfish.”

“ Selfish, Arthur ? ”

“ Yes, May, selfish, though not sinfully, because unintentionally so.”

"But in what way?—I don't understand."

"Look there, May!"—and he pointed to the silver clouds, with their faint, gold edging, as they passed in swift, yet stately procession across the moon-crowned sky. "Do you remember our father's dying words?"

She covered her face with her small white hands. "I understand you now, Arthur. But I was thinking of the means, not of the end, when I spoke—one forgets that sometimes, when thinking of others. It is more easy to remember it for oneself."

"You are quite right, May; it is then, most of all, one is apt to magnify the 'little while.'" And drawing her arm more closely than before within his own, they returned silently home.

A telegram the following day from Lord St. Clair announcing a two days' reprieve ere the commencement of their journey, the arrangement of which he had without much difficulty been able to accomplish, brought more pleasure to our little party than can easily be conceived by those who have never known the day when they would fain have put out of sight, or at least shut their ears to the sound of, every clock around, lest it should remind them, in too thrilling prophecy, of this time to-morrow. Philosophers would possibly suggest to us, that as the parting was to come at last, it made little difference when—the sooner over the better; but thank Heaven, we are not all philosophers, and to the loving hearts at Haseldyne, those few days' unlooked-for delay were indeed full of real enjoyment. Rachel said it reminded her of the midsummer before the railway was completed, and Arthur had to go up to his London school by coach when the holidays were over; and they all walked up to the high road to wait for the coach; and how red she remembered her eyes and May's were with crying, and Arthur tried to laugh at them, and pretended not to care about

going, saying school was a capital place, and the boys first-rate fellows, and the masters bricks; and all the while he kept pulling out his pocket-handkerchief, and blowing his nose, pretending he had a bad cold; and how at last the coach came up, and just as they were giving him a last kiss, the coachman called out, "No room to-day, sir—for these times we're always so precious full;" and how they all came back laughing and singing, to mamma and papa, and then went to the hay meadow which had been flooded by the heavy rains, and got into a large brewing tub the gardener had rolled down on purpose for them; and how they were upset, and had to creep home and change their wet things in secret for fear of being sent to bed; and how they persuaded kind Father Paul to spend the evening with them, and acted charades to amuse him.

"But the coach came at last for him, didn't it, May?" whispered little Algernon, who had been listening open-mouthed to Rachel's true story.

"Yes, Algie; the coach always comes at last," said May sadly, as she stroked down the child's long curling hair, and thought of the time when life's heavy-laden coach would carry him too from her side to its hard, rough school.

"But, May," said the little boy, putting his rosy mouth to her ear, as if he divined her thoughts, "the coach will never come for me, you know, because I am to go to a day-school when we get to London, and come home every evening; and when I am a big boy, I shall be able to take care of you and Rachel and dear mamma, and earn money to make you all rich again."

"Yes, the coach always comes at last," sighed May to herself, as she locked Arthur's well-packed travelling-trunk, next morning. He had arranged to travel by that evening's train. But why linger over a parting, one among too many others of which no words of ours can paint the silent agony.

At six o'clock the little household knelt for their last *Angelus* together; it had been their custom for years. Never had the "Hail, Mary, full of grace," ascended more pleadingly upward; seldom had the pathetic words continually re-echoed through the Catholic Church, "Pray for us now, and at the hour of our death," been uttered with intenser and more childlike faith in their reality. Then came a silent embrace—a few smothered sobs, and shortly afterwards a well-known whistle (to some ears that sound appeared a shriek) in the distance, reminding the inhabitants of Haseldyne, that the train for Folkstone had just started.

CHAPTER V.

“Sculptors of life are we as we stand,
With our souls uncarved before us,—
Waiting the hour when, at God’s command,
Our life-dream shall pass o’er us.”—ANON.

“WHY, Phœbe, is this London?” exclaimed a little voice in a tone of disappointment, wholly at variance with the sunny face of the speaker, as a well-loaded cab, in the rear of another equally rich in luggage, drove along the narrow streets on the southern side of the Thames, and proceeded in the direction of Westminster, the final point of its destination.

“Yes, Master Algie, in course this is London, and glad am I to be there at last; I never was so squeezed and jostled, and tumbled over and pushed about, in all my life, as we was at that there great station-place just now; and as to the luggage, if all mistress’s drawing-room ornaments are not smashed to pieces, it will be a wonder.”

“But, Phœbe,” continued the child, disregarding all but the answer to his question; “I didn’t think London was like this. It is so dull and dirty, and there are no beautiful churches, or grand houses; and the people all look cross or sad, and everybody seems in such a tremendous hurry; what are they going to do?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure, Master Algie; I suppose some of them is in a hurry, because they’ve more to do than there’s time to do it in, and some because they’ve nothing to do but to be in a hurry, and wants to get they don’t exactly know what. But I wish you’d sit still, sir, and not

keep staring out of the window in that there way ; it's very dangerous. I once heard tell of a young gentleman as was killed because he would not sit still in his papa's carriage, and the door flew open all on a sudden, and he fell out afore they could catch him, and he was killed on the spot."

"But I was—I was only trying to see how the other little coach is getting on with mamma, May, and Rachel inside," said the boy, as, with an habitual obedience, he re-seated himself opposite the old servant. "But when shall we get to the Queen's palace, Phœbe, and the British Museum, and the beautiful churches Father Paul told me about which the Catholics built hundreds of years ago, and Henry VIII. robbed them of?"

"Lor bless you, child, you must have patience ; you can't see everything in a minute. I've heerd tell, it takes a life-long to see all over London."

"How many years go to a life-long?" asked the child.

"I'm sure I don't know, Master Algie, no more than you. It depends how long a body lives or doesn't live. Some folk's life-long is twenty years, some forty, some fifty or sixty, and some get up to a hundred by chance, now and then."

"But I mean, Phœbe, how long is a little child's life-long—a little child's, like me?"

"Goodness, Master Algie, how can I tell? I'm not a prophet, nor yet an angel. A child lives till it dies, like other people."

"Oh, then, little Amy, who died when she was a baby, had only a three weeks' life-long, had she?" persisted Algernon, who always chose to dive to the bottom of his perplexities. Phœbe assented.

"But that is what puzzles me, Phœbe? You said it took a life-long to see London, and yet little Amy's would have been a hundred times too short."

"You should not be always asking such curious, out-of-

the-way questions, Master Algernon. I cannot think who ever puts them into your head."

"No more can I," said the child. "I wonder who it is. I know who puts the good thoughts there, and I know who puts the naughty ones;" and he shook his head with much solemnity; "but I never could find out who sends the curious ones, unless it is the fairies."

"Nonsense, child—nonsense; there's no such a thing as fairies; they only lives in story-books and fables," Phœbe answered, with the look of a Minerva, "and in such-like out-of-the-way, make-believe tales: but it's no use for you to ask me no more questions, Master Algie; for the long and the short of it is, I'm not clever enough to answer them."

"Can't you though, really?" was the reply, in a tone of unmitigated astonishment; for, to Algernon, Phœbe was numbered among the seven wonders of his eight-year-old-world. "Why, I think you are very clever *indeed*, Phœbe; you can cook good dinners, and make bread, and nurse us when we are ill, and trim smart bonnets for yourself; and look how nicely you packed all the kitchen things up when we left poor Haseldyne."

"But that is not what is meant by cleverness, Master Algie; clever folks read hard books, and understand wonderful things, and speak all sorts of languages, and sing and play beautiful, like Miss May, and draw pictures, like Miss Rachel does."

"Well, Phœbe," replied Algernon, in a consoling voice, tossing his auburn curls backwards and forwards, as if the action rendered his words more impressive; "if you are not clever, I'm sure you're very good and kind. I heard mamma say so, too. She said it was very good indeed of you to leave dear, dear Haseldyne and come and be with us, now we are so poor, and have hardly any money to give

you. She said God would bless you for it, and our sweet Lady too. Oh Phœbe, have I made you unhappy? Was it naughty of me to tell you what mamma said?" exclaimed the little boy sorrowfully, as he watched two large tears drop upon the old-fashioned black merino dress, first worn in the year 1790,—the year in which Phœbe lost her widowed mother,—and now put on again to show respect for her master and his family. "Don't cry, Phœbe," continued the child soothingly, as he climbed on her knee. "When I'm grown up and can earn plenty of money, I'll take you back to Haseldyne with mamma and sisters, and you shall marry old Joseph, the gardener, and live in such a pretty little house, covered with roses and honeysuckle, and have nothing to do but to say your rosary, and go to church all day long; won't that be nice, Phœbe?"

The old woman's only reply was one of those annihilating hugs she was accustomed to bestow upon the tiny form, almost too fragile-looking for such roughly-demonstrated affection. The embrace this time, however, was destined to arrive at a still more rough termination, as the cab, after swinging this way and that way, turning down three more streets, in the vain hope of finding a short cut to the right one, at last drew up with a sudden jerk, throwing Phœbe and her little charge with unceremonious violence on the opposite seat, to the infinite delight of Algernon, whose peals of laughter even the tired driver found irresistible, as he opened the door, with a smile of amusement, exclaiming, "Here we are, young gentleman; you seems uncommon cheerful this foggy evening. Why, what's the matter, miss?" to Phœbe, who, with an indignant expression of countenance, her black straw bonnet crushed into the form of a narrow coal-scuttle, was trying to gather up the innumerable parcels and other small articles deposited by the cabman's last performance at the bottom of the vehicle.

"The matter, indeed! as if you couldn't see what the matter was without pretending to ask. Here, you've been and upset all missis's little things down in this here straw; and just after I'd put 'em handy to lift out and all. I never seed such a diversion in my born days. If this is what you call London driving, the less we gets of it the better. First a jump, and then a plunge, and then a jerk, and then a sort of a whirlpool round and round, and then a regular downright somerset of everything, children and selves included. Why, its no better than a hearthquake."

"Werry sorry, miss," apologized the cabman, who, with an eye to his fare, assisted Phœbe, with a politeness (which lost not its intended effect), to recover and arrange her overturned treasures; "but it's quite impossible to see the numbers one's a driving to, these dark afternoons; and the 'orse is so tired, poor beast, he can't hardly draw hisself along. We've been on duty together, he and I, since five o'clock this blessed wet mornin', as you remember it were, if you chanced to be up so early."

"Well, I dare say you work hard enough," was the much-softened reply; "but I don't see no good you do yourself driving in that outlandish manner; it's enough to put one off one's head, to say nothing of spoiling a nice new bonnet;" and with these words Phœbe commenced a vigorous attempt at settling the coal-scuttle into its original shape, while the cabman continued to unload the remainder of the luggage. During the course of the foregoing dialogue, Algernon had danced off to the other "little coach," which, with Rachel's assistance, Mrs. Templeton was gradually descending; May having flown the moment the door was opened into their future home, to draw an arm-chair to the fire, which she had given strict instructions should be lighted against their arrival, and to see whether the kettle for tea was likely to boil,—a consideration of no slight importance to

November travellers after a journey of nearly two hundred miles.

The fire—if a huge heap of coals piled up to the chimney, with a faint glimmer of red at the further extremity, could be thus designated—was, of course, just lighted; the charwoman who had been hired to clean and take care of the house, after the usual custom of London charwomen when left to their own devices, having chosen to put three days' work into one, and in consequence having been too busy in the midst of sweeping, scrubbing, and general confusion, with which from early dawn she had become immersed, to remember the most important part of the directions received from Miss Templeton a week before, written out, albeit, in the largest text hand, for her especial edification. The good lady, bucket in one hand, duster in the other, and gown tucked up, stood apologizing in a loud though would-be melancholy voice to May; who, by dint of nearly choking herself, had managed to blow the embers into something like a flame, when Mrs. Templeton, leaning on Rachel's arm, entered the room, and sank, exhausted by the exertion of ascending, into a chair by the door.

"The fire will soon burn, mamma, dear," said May, as the cheerful crackling sound seconded her voice; gently desiring the charwoman, who fully expected, as she told her husband on her return home that night, "no end of a rowing," to go and help with the luggage.

She ran down stairs in search of the kettle, and a wonderfully short space of time found Mrs. Templeton sipping a cup of tea by a blazing fire, while May knelt at her feet, trying to rub warmth into them, and Rachel, to divert her mother's attention, gave an absurd description of the encounter she had at the station with a lady who insisted upon marching off with one of their boxes, declaring it to be her own, or her son's, who had departed in search of a brooch

she had lost in the railway-carriage, and who could not be persuaded till his return that the box, which happened unfortunately to have lost the label, and also to be enclosed in the same sort of wrapping as her own, did in reality belong to Mrs. Templeton.

Algernon, meanwhile, rather to the surprise of his sisters, remained below, "seeing after the luggage," as he informed the cabman, much to the amusement of that individual, who, in the spirit of implicit obedience, followed the directions of the little boy, as, cap in hand, he stood by the door, watching with eager interest the unloading of every package, until at last his whole attention became absorbed in the safety of one particularly large and heavy hamper, requiring the united assistance of cabman, Phœbe, and charwoman, to carry it into the passage.

About this hamper some great mystery evidently hung, to judge from Algernon's proceedings, who seemed to consider it a matter of life and death that his sisters and mamma should be kept in ignorance of its very existence, much less of his having any sort of interest in, or knowledge of its contents. He wandered restlessly about at the bottom of the stairs, listening to every sound above, till the mysterious hamper was safely deposited in the coal-cellar, out of everybody's sight except Carlo's, Arthur's pet dog, which had accompanied them from Haseldyne, and who was the sharer of all Algernon's secrets. The feat being accomplished, the child scampered into the drawing-room to kiss mamma, and see if she was very tired, and then rushed three steps at a time into the little attic, in which he was to sleep, taking every other bedroom in his way. Down again in two minutes, to tell May he could see the spire of St. Mary's out of his tiny window, and to ask when she and Rachel would find time to call upon all the people who lived in that long street. What quantities of friends they

would have ; — he hoped there would be some nice little boys and girls for him to play with among them.

Algernon could not in the least understand his sister's reply, that people in London may suffer and rejoice, live and die, weep and laugh, lie ill, perhaps, for months and months, year after year, with none to care whether they are ill or well, happy or miserable, in the same street with each other, often next door even.

"That was so very funny ; it did not seem quite kind. They never did so at Haseldyne," said Algernon ; and then he was going to inquire whether the people who lived in the same street would know each other after they died, only he remembered what Phœbe said in the cab, and felt afraid this was one of the curious questions the fairies *would* put into his head,—for he was quite certain there *were* fairies, and he thought they lived in the flowers ; but he would ask May all about it some day, when they were quite alone. She always answered his questions, and never said he ought not to be curious.

The following morning, he, Phœbe, and Carlo, were up very early indeed, and Rachel fancied in her dreams she heard footsteps continually going up and downstairs, only she was too sleepy to wake up, and kept saying to herself—'It's only a dream, it's only a dream !' till she woke May, who asked her what she was talking about, and that woke Rachel ; and then they both laughed and kissed each other, and were off to sleep again in a second. They were so very, very tired, and they had worked so hard the last week or two at Haseldyne, and in secret had shed so many tears, that may have been the cause of their unusual fatigue.

"Crying times are more than playing," was Algernon's remark on one occasion, when he had cut his finger with a sharp penknife Lord St. Clair had given him for a birthday present.

Rachel laughed over her dream as she combed her long fair hair that morning, and scolded May for giving her such strong tea last night.

When they came down to breakfast, however, the dream was discovered to be a reality; Algernon was standing radiant with happiness near the window by the side of a table on which were tastefully arranged a quantity of plants and flowers from the greenhouse at Haseldyne, which the thoughtful child, knowing his mother and sisters' love for them, had, while they were occupied with more important matters, persuaded old Joseph the gardener to pack for him in the hamper, over which he had presided with such watchful care.

The sisters were even more surprised and delighted than he expected.

"It would make dear mamma feel at home again," they said, "to see all her favourite flowers there; and it was so clever of Algie to have managed and kept it all such a secret."

"Bless the child!" said Phœbe, who had been standing outside the door enjoying his delight, seconded by Carlo, who, to prove his sympathy with his young master, was rushing with frantic gestures round and round the room, trying to get his woolly tail into his mouth, and growling because it was not long enough.

"To my mind," continued the faithful old servant, as she laid the cup and saucer, bread, and butter for her own breakfast, and, for want of a better but certainly not more patient listener, communicated her ideas with much emphasis to Mr. Nobody who sat opposite, and did not contradict her—"To my mind, he's a deal handsomer than any of them flowers up there he's been so busy about; they're well enough in the country, but I'm afeard they'll be making a mess and a dirt in the drawing-room; and London has dirt and dust enough of it's own, one might think, without we're

bringing no more—'owever, no one couldn't cross that boy—leastways I couldn't—he'll have enough to cross him afore—more than enough afore he's half as old as I am." Here the old woman sighed, and looked appealingly at Mr. Nobody, who appeared silently to acquiesce.

"If he were my child now, I'd be wishing he warn't quite so pretty and so clever-like. I 'ave heard say, the prettiest flowers is always them as fades the quickest, and it's of no manner of use to be fixing your 'art upon things, if they's a-going to be taken away from you; howsomever, that's easier said than done, ain't it?" and with these sage remarks, in the truth of which her companion still silently coincided, Phœbe rose from her seat, and was soon joined by Algernon, who declared his intention of helping her to set things to rights, as May had given him a holiday, but was too busy to take him out at present, and Rachel was too frightened to go without May, lest she might lose her way, which Algernon said, with heightened colour, was very silly of Rachel, because, of course, he could have taken care of her; boys always took care of ladies; and he should like to see the people that dare speak rudely to May or Rachel when he was with them, indeed; they would not do it again in a hurry.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Act—act in the living present,
Heart within, and God o’erhead.”—LONGFELLOW.

EIGHT o’clock in the morning—of all the busy hours in the busy London world, perhaps the most momentous and full of mingled interests. Those thousand-and-one swift messengers of pleasure, congratulations, and success, no less than of lamentation, mourning, and love, perambulate street, park, square, and terrace, and down into remote court and alley, springing with lightning step from door to door, while with careless hand, they give the sharp, well-known sound for which so many beating hearts within are either tremblingly or hopefully expectant. After these arrive the scarce less important newspaper boys, with their shrill announcement of *Times*, *Morning Post*, *Morning Chronicle*, *Daily News*; and the servant of all work—we beg her pardon, “the general servant”—hastens into the area to catch the paper for which master has been waiting this half-hour—to carry it up at her leisure on the breakfast-tray some twenty minutes afterwards; while the powdered lacquey, after reading the court and police aloud for the benefit of the lady’s maid, who chances at that moment to be passing through the well-warmed hall, lays it on the table with a yawn, exclaiming, as he stretches his arms out towards the stove, on the stupidity of the papers—for nowadays there’s hardly ever a murder worth hearing of, and nothing to excite one’s feelings; others, however, less favoured by good dame Fortune, than the well, perhaps rather over fed gentleman’s gentleman, think differently;

and ere nine o'clock sounds from timepiece or church tower, hundreds, nay, thousands, we had almost said millions, of busy eyes and hearts are more or less absorbed in the varied contents of the world-famed *Times*, and many an hour's grave meditation might be snatched from a birds-eye glance at the strangely different expressions called forth on the faces of the readers by that half-hour's perusal. Tears and smiles, sighs and laughter, pass in rapid succession before our eyes as we wander in spirit hither and thither, and stand unseen spectators beside the hearth, while many an anxious letter of business is quickly despatched, many an elegant note of congratulation, or deeply-edged one of condolence, real or feigned, indited, or many an advertisement answered on which the writer's last hope of subsistence depends, and for which, alas! there are but too many applicants. At the head of this well-studied column, on the morning of which we are about to speak, appeared the following:—"Wanted by a lady and her daughter, passionately fond of the divine science of music, both vocal and instrumental, daily instructions in the above accomplishments. To prevent misunderstandings on either side, none but a lady in manners, education, appearance, and style, need apply. N.B.—At home only between the hours of eleven and one."

The snow was falling in heavy flakes on road and pavement, the wind drifting it rudely here and there, not sparing the faces of straggling passers-by, as they sought under cover of mufftee and wrapper partial escape from its violence; while the whole appearance of the sky suggested to those not obliged by stern necessity to disregard such advice the prudence of remaining in doors the entire day, whatever temptation in the way of sight-seeing or visiting might offer outside.

Not a few, however, were compelled to disregard on that morning the voice of prudence, to listen to the sterner call

of labour ; and among these were many who might without presumption lay claim to three, at least, of the requirements mentioned in the advertisement just quoted. Women young and delicate—fond daughters and loving sisters—ladies by birth, education, manners, and appearance, brought up in luxury, and once surrounded by all this world has to bestow, must learn to work sometimes, ay, and work hard too, to earn at one and the same time a scanty pittance, and the world's contempt—we are not using too harsh a term. In England the woman who works, instantly loses caste ; not, to be sure, if she can gain celebrity—not if her pictures are admired at fashionable exhibitions—if her novels are on every library table ? Then, indeed, she may keep her position ; but the army in the rear, pressing forwards and continually driven back, what of them ? Is it not a cruel and an unjust thing that almost every employment is shut out from women ; that they are educated in the very way most calculated to deter them from bearing their part in the struggle around them—the struggle in which, nevertheless, they are so often called upon to take their share. A governess—a teacher—a woman of education, talent, and refinement, who spends her whole life in a conscientious discharge of no light duties, who, not unfrequently slaves from morning to night, with the same industry, patience, and unwearied perseverance as the man who, as life advances, reaps the fair reward of his exertions—what is *her* prospect in old age ? A glance down the voting-list of the Governesses' Asylum will inform us ; a long weary canvass of years to attain an annuity of £20, too often her all. It may be said—why did she not save ? why did she not provide against this day by investing the money she earned in youth ? It was not so easy—sixty, eighty pounds are quite the average payment ; a certain style of dress is required of her ; and then, the aged mother, or the sister to be kept at school, or the brother to be pushed

on in life, or the debt to be paid incurred through no fault of hers, but too often through the advantage others have taken of her ignorance of money matters—one of these was the object on which she spent her hardly-earned salary. What has she done that she must needs be scorned at and looked down upon, be passed by former friends as forgotten, and made to feel a certain sense of degradation in the society of which she was once the ornament? Had she been a man with half the education, and none of the talent, middle life might have found her regaining her home and hoping to spend her old age in comfort. If it were but once recognized that women not only can work, but ought to work, and their exertions were regarded in the same light as that of men, what a change for the better might not spread itself over the whole face of society. Then daughters would no longer be considered a burden; then women would cease to be educated in frivolous pursuits and mere accomplishments; then they would have better interests than the last novel, or the newest fashions; then marriage would be less frequently a bargain, and many sins be diminished. So would it surely be if the women of England could take their places in the ranks of workers with honour and respect. Our readers will pardon this digression; there are few who do not feel equally interested with ourselves on the subject. So, many young ladies set out that morning cheerfully in spite of the falling snow, for their slender means will not allow them to avoid it by paying two shillings for cab-hire, and what cabman can be expected to take less for two miles and three-quarters' drive in such weather? No matter, they are bent on a blessed errand, though that errand is but to answer a *Times* advertisement. They go through sleet and snow and piercing wind, and through what is far worse, their fellow-men, or rather fellow-women's, freezing condescension, to seek perhaps, for the hundredth time a means of supplying

their loving ones with the subsistence adverse circumstances or the cruelty of others have deprived them of. Many sallied forth that morning with hopeful hearts; for each thought to herself, surely there would be but few competitors on such a day—to return, alas! downcast and depressed in spirit, though, still outwardly cheerful in manner, announcing the failure of another prospect of getting something to do, and to wait with patience for the next day's *Times*. Cheer up, cast-down and disappointed ones! The weary walk was not taken quite in vain, though to outward eyes it may have appeared so; unseen watchers followed your patient footsteps, noted down your humility—your uncomplaining submission; and some of these days you will hear of that walk again, and smile to look back upon it, even as little children smile in their peaceful sleep, and dimly shadow forth our coming rest!

The fire burned brightly in Mrs. Cunningham's handsomely-furnished drawing-room, casting forth glowing beams on the opposite picture-frames, and forming a pleasing contrast to the gloom without, when a footman in blue and silver livery opened the door, carefully closing it behind him, for fear of admitting the draught of cold air which the united efforts of two well-filled stoves could not altogether exclude from the hall and staircase, ere he announced to his mistress that another young lady was waiting below, adding, with true footman *nonchalance* of tone and manner, the oft-repeated inquiry, whether he should show her up.

"What does the man say, my sweet Augusta?" murmured a lady, languidly raising her head from the sofa on which she was reclining, wrapped in a cashmere shawl, her feet enclosed in fur slippers of many-coloured embroidery, and to judge from their premeditated display, by no means ignorant, either feet or slippers, of their claim to admiration.

"He says," answered a voice from one of the windows in

the distance, "that another of these unfortunate ladies is waiting below, and asks if you will see her."

"Oh no, my love, not on any account; she must call again to-morrow. I am far too fatigued already with the exertions of the morning. I dread, more than I have words to articulate, a return of that terrible palpitation I suffered from in the summer from over-exertion."

"What sort of a person is she, Mathews?" addressing the servant.

"Well, ma'am," replied Mathews, in a half-deprecatory tone, "she looks very cold and tired, and——"

"What does he say, my dear?" and the head, which had sunk into the depths of the sofa-cushion, was again languidly elevated.

"You'd better come nearer mamma, Mathews," exclaimed the voice from the other side of the room; "she cannot hear what you say."

Mathews obeyed, and repeated his answer.

"What an extraordinary thing it is, Mathews, that you never can comprehend the sense and utility of giving a proper answer to my interrogatories," replied his mistress, in an injured tone. "I did not ask whether the young person looked cold or warm, I simply alluded to her general appearance."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, ma'am, I didn't quite understand. Well, I should say she looks quite the lady, ma'am, —very pale and delicate; and there's a little boy along with her, and they are both dressed in deep mourning."

"What folly is this—bringing children with them! He will be doing some mischief or other with the furniture. Why could she not come alone?—these young people give themselves such airs, it is really absurd! Well, Mathews, you can give my compliments, and say I am too much overdone by the numbers who have already applied. If Miss—

whatever her name is—wishes for a trial, she may call again to-morrow morning at the same hour, when I shall, perhaps, have more spirits to attend to her. But first draw the sofa more closely to the fire, and put fresh coal on—it is so horribly cold this morning,—and desire cook to send luncheon up here to-day, as I cannot possibly venture down till the weather changes.”

The man was about to obey these directions, when the voice from the window-recess was again heard, in louder tones than before: “Good gracious, mamma! you don’t mean to send the poor thing away on such a day as this without even seeing her? It is not fit for a cat to be out. I call it downright cruelty.”

“My beloved Augusta,” faintly ejaculated Mrs. Cunningham, “why speak in such strong terms—you quite distress me. I presume other people, alas! are obliged to venture out in the snow as well as this young lady. I have no doubt she is accustomed to it, poor young creature; habit is everything in this sad (but most lovely) world of ours.”

“Habit or no habit, we have no right to let her go without hearing her sing, and thus, at least, saving her the trouble of coming again,” was the abrupt, almost rude, reply. “Not that, for my own sake, I wish to have my ears tortured again; they have had more than enough for one day already. But I am not quite a brute yet, though I begin to think this detestable world will make me one before long.”

“Hush, hush, my Augusta; you little know the agony you are inflicting on your mother. My nerves are wholly incompetent for the task you impose on them. Nevertheless, I resign myself to your wishes, since your too tender and over-sensitive heart takes so strong a view of the matter.”

And Mathews—who, at the commencement of the altercation, had, with ready tact, retreated to the door, assuming an expression of the most placid neutrality, and apparently deaf, dumb, and blind to all sublunary things, with the exception of the gilded cornices on the ceiling, in the contemplation of which he appeared to have become suddenly absorbed—was once more beckoned forward, and commanded, in a die-away tone, to show the young lady into the drawing-room ; but on no account whatever to bring the noisy child ; some one must watch below and keep him quiet. Perhaps Mathews had better take him into the kitchen, out of harm's way.

Mathews, however, who appeared to possess, as the less educated often do, more sense of propriety than his betters, chose for once to follow his own instinct, and after showing the lady with much politeness up stairs, went to his pantry, and rummaged out an old pictured history of Robinson Crusoe, a rather dilapidated remnant of his school-days, for the benefit of the young gentleman in the parlour, at the same time taking off his wet boots and laying them before the fire to dry, saying kindly, that his sister would soon be down again. He did not tell the child to sit quiet and do no mischief, and, judging also from his appearance that the furniture would be quite safe without his superintendence, the footman ran down into the kitchen, rubbing his hands, and informing the fat cook, who was preparing a hot luncheon for the upstairs, and a hot dinner for the downstairs, one o'clock meal, that he had sooner be a negro slave ten times over than one of those teachers or governesses. He pitied them from his heart, especially when they were ladies and no mistake, like the one he had just shown into the drawing-room. The fat cook coincided with him, and declared it was a mortal shame not to offer them a cup of hot tea or something, afore they was sent away,

with nothing for their pains but wet feet and a long walk home. "It made her blood run cold," she said, "to look out of doors and think of the many poor wretches as had nothing to keep them warm;" and, with these words, she threw a good half-pound of beefsteak (enough to have made soup for a whole family in one of the courts full of half-starving ones not far from her mistress's house) to the Skye terrier, who had two hours before breakfasted on a plateful of cold mutton from yesterday's dinner. But we are detaining our readers below, when, doubtless, they would prefer ascending two stories higher, and listening to a more refined conversation.

Mrs. Cunningham raised her eye-glass, and made a slight, a *very* slight inclination of the head, as May Templeton entered the apartment. The invisible young lady did not approach. She withdrew herself and her embroidery-frame more deeply than before into the recess from which the remonstrances of Mrs. Cunningham had vainly attempted to dislodge her for the last hour and a half, prophesying that inflammation of the lungs would inevitably ensue on her remaining in so frigid a locality.

"Pray sit down," said Mrs. Cunningham, after a hasty but scrutinizing reconnoitre of the stranger from head to foot, as she pointed to the chair immediately opposite. "May I ask your name, and where you were last teaching. The master under whom you have been studying, and your usual terms?"

May replied to the first and third questions, but added, she had not been in the habit of giving instruction excepting to her youngest sister, and knew nothing about terms. She was proceeding to explain the reason, but Mrs. Cunningham stopped her.

"Oh, pray do not give yourself any further trouble, Miss Templeton; my daughter and myself are too pas-

sionately fond of music to run the risk of acquiring an inferior style ; excuse me for saying so, but what else could be expected from an instructress who has no other training to boast of but what a country home could afford her ?”

The colour mounted to May’s forehead ; but she replied, without change of manner, that her mother had been taught by some of the first masters of her day, and, having always been considered a finished musician by those who were competent to decide the question, she had considered it unnecessary to employ any one but herself in the musical education of her children.

“ I perfectly understand what you mean,” rejoined Mrs. Cunningham, scarcely permitting her to finish the sentence. “ I have no doubt your mother was quite justified. Masters are expensive luxuries ; but, nevertheless, facts speak for themselves, and I therefore regret you should have troubled yourself to answer my advertisement in person—a note would have been equally satisfactory under the circumstances. However,” continued the lady, interested in spite of herself by the look of sorrowful disappointment passing over the face, whose touching beauty few could gaze upon unmoved, “ I have no objection to hear you sing—the piano is open—Augusta, my love, will you attend for a moment ? Only, pray, Miss Templeton, let it be either something of the German or Italian school ; I am sick of English ballads.”

“ Very pretty, very pretty, indeed !” exclaimed Mrs. Cunningham, when May had finished one or two songs. “ You have a rich voice and sing with feeling, and I must confess that the tremulous tones in which you occasionally articulate your words is not without merit and originality ; but notwithstanding this, you must excuse me saying, my dear young lady, that untaught, or at least uncultivated talent, such as yours evidently is, will not in any degree supply the want of finish and execution which now obtains

in the musical world. I should strongly advise you to take lessons, at any sacrifice, from some of the London masters, and have, no doubt, in time, you will succeed in meeting with pupils, but for the present my daughter and myself must decline entering into any engagement, our object being to acquire the style now in vogue."

"Pray speak for yourself, mamma, and not for other people!" exclaimed Miss Cunningham, pushing aside her work-frame at this crisis, and approaching the piano where May was seated. "My object is to do nothing of the kind. It does not matter a snap of my finger (and she suited her action to the words) what is in vogue or out of vogue. I love music for its own sake, I listen to music for its own sake, and I mean to learn it for its own sake into the bargain; that is my object, and I should like extremely to take lessons with Miss Templeton. I would give a good deal to sing in that style. It is something worth listening to, and that's more than one can often say nowadays."

"My dearest Augusta, you are so foolishly enthusiastic, and arrive at such odd conclusions without a moment's pause or consideration; but we will talk the matter over; perhaps Miss Templeton will be good enough to wait below for a short time;" and she rang the bell. May left the room with a half-sad, half-amused smile.

"I never heard so exquisite a voice before," was Augusta's exclamation, when May was out of hearing,—“I could sit for hours and listen to it. She absolutely brought tears to my eyes, and it is not all your finished songsters who can accomplish that."

"But, my dear love, you take the wrong side of the question—indeed you do, my Augusta. The sound of natural waterfalls, as they dash with rude grandeur into the ocean beneath, or the roar of the crested wave, as it rolls madly towards the shore, is surely a thousandfold inferior

to the distant murmuring of the gentle stream, as it softly meanders through the undulating grounds of some fair, cultivated pasture-land."

"I don't know what you mean, mamma," replied the young lady bluntly; "I never do when you launch off in that way; it drives me out to sea at once. I detest poetry, and all that sort of humbug; but this I do know, that I admire Miss Templeton's singing more than I can express. I admire her manner, and everything about her; and, in fact, if you object to her giving me singing-lessons, I would rather not take any at all."

"My beloved Augusta, your wild impetuosity of disposition gives me the deepest anxiety; nevertheless, you always gain the day with your too fondly indulgent mother. I will ring for Miss Templeton again."

"Not for the world!" cried Miss Cunningham, catching her mother's hand; "I will go and speak to her myself. I should feel ashamed to make her dance attendance upon us again; she is evidently quite a lady, and has not been accustomed to earn her own bread: and how sweetly pretty she is, too!"

"Yes, I must confess she is a great deal too good-looking for walking alone. It is extremely wrong of her mother to allow it—she must be a very extraordinary person."

"I thought," answered Augusta drily, "that Mathews told you she had brought a little boy with her."

"Did he—oh yes, yes, I remember; well, it was rather nonsensical, when one comes to consider it. They must bend to their circumstances, whether they are plain or otherwise, poor creatures. It is difficult to decide which is worse for people—to give themselves airs, or——"

"Or to be pretty! I suppose," added Miss Cunningham, with a short, dry laugh, as she advanced to the door. "Well, one comfort is, if I ever have to shift for myself

hereafter—and none of us know what may happen—that last difficulty will not stand in my way. No one will fall in love with Augusta Cunningham's face, though they so often do with her fortune!"

"My child—my beloved child, you will kill me, indeed you will, if you insist on saying such heartrending things;" and Mrs. Cunningham held her lace pocket-handkerchief to her eyes. But Augusta was out of hearing, humming, as she went along, the words of some popular song.

She found May in the parlour, with Algernon upon her knee. He was showing her the pictures in the book Mathews had lent him, looking up now and then into her face with a look, which said more plainly than words, how perfectly he understood she had been going through some disagreeable business, and how he longed to comfort her.

"I am very sorry to have kept you so long waiting," said Augusta, drawing a chair to the fire, and sitting down by May. "I should like to take a course of singing-lessons from you so very much, if you will kindly tell me what days you are disengaged, and the hours it will best suit you to come to our house. But stop a minute, we can settle that presently;" and she ran out of the room, returning shortly with two tumblers of hot wine-and-water, some biscuits, and a large slice of plum-cake for Algernon.

"Is this your little brother?" she asked, kindly taking his hand.

"Yes," replied Algernon proudly, "I am May's brother, and mamma sent me here to take care of her."

"I once had a brother about your age," said Augusta—(she seldom spoke with so much softness). "Will you come here again, with your sister, sometimes? I will show you such pretty things; and there is a rocking-horse in my bedroom, you may ride on, if you like. It belonged to my little dead brother Algernon."

"Why, that is my name," exclaimed the wonder-struck child. I didn't know any other little boy was called the same."

Augusta bent down and kissed him, saying it was curious enough it should happen so ; and that they must be great friends, and he must come and see her as often as possible.

"Thank you," said Algie ; "I shall like to come very much ; and besides, you know, I *must* come to take care of May."

After a little more conversation between the young ladies, it was arranged that May should devote three or perhaps four mornings in the week to Mrs. and Miss Cunningham ; for, as Augusta remarked, mamma was certain to come round to her opinion before long,—she always did ; but she might as well tell Miss Templeton at once not to be surprised when she found that her mother had no more voice than a raven, only it pleased her to fancy she had ; and as, for her own part, she quite agreed in the saying about it being folly to be wise when ignorance was bliss, she never undeceived her.

It jarred painfully on May's feelings to hear Miss Cunningham speak with such utter want of the reverent affection she was so wont to pay her own dear mother ; the more so, because her kindness to herself and Algernon had already engaged her interest in this rough-spoken young lady ; but, as usual, she made large allowances, and laid it more to the charge of Miss Cunningham's extreme oddity of manner than to any graver fault.

May went home with a light heart that afternoon, and the following Monday entered the class of "workers,"—a necessity she had anticipated with some degree of dread from the day of her father's death. The difficulties, however, vanished like ghosts the nearer she approached them, and her task became rather amusing than otherwise.

Mrs. Cunningham, the daughter of a country apothecary, had been educated in the school of which sickly sentimentalism is the prevailing genius; refinement (so called) of manner being the end and object, for the attainment of which every natural thought, word, action, and impulse is to be sacrificed with a determination and perseverance worthy of a better cause. Her very pretty face and figure had attracted the eye, and at last fascinated the heart of Mr. Cunningham, a gentleman of considerable property and good family, residing in her father's neighbourhood. His money and position in life had far greater and more seductive charms for the elegant Miss Connor than the rough manners and unpolished good temper unfortunately accompanying them. Having, however, weighed the advantages and disadvantages of such a union in the scales of inclination and ambition, the latter turned the balance, and she decided upon marrying him, much to the joy of her family, and the envy of her country-town friends, who consoled themselves, the unmarried ones at least, by quizzing Mr. Cunningham—that great red-faced, vulgar-looking man—to their admiring partners at the next public ball.

Mrs. Cunningham had ever since her marriage led the existence—we will not call it the life—of an indolent and languid beauty. Men of Mr. Cunningham's stamp, luckily for themselves, seldom risk their life's whole happiness on the woman they marry. She is one among many objects of as great, if not of far greater, interest; moreover, there are many men, yes, even Englishmen—our readers are our company, and therefore are always excepted—who are perfectly satisfied if the prettily-dressed doll they call by the sacred name of wife, looks well at the head of their dinner-table, is tolerably even-tempered, and does not interfere with their pursuits. The idea of finding her an intelligent companion, a congenial friend, never enters their head; if it

does, is speedily banished again by the very impracticability of the thing. The doll, meanwhile, is contented enough, for her part, with the handsome carriage—the ready purse—the constant opera-ticket—the admiration of her fashionable friends. After all, says the world, it was not so bad a bargain,—each party has what each party sought for.

True, O World!—but what says the Church? Has she no voice in the matter? Yes,—but we are too busy to listen to her. Go on with the story,—don't interrupt us so often. Well, dear reader, we were about to say that everybody has a heart somewhere or other: even you, and the pretty dolls we have been so hard upon, are gifted with the same priceless endowment; only they carry it so lightly beneath their silks and satins, that no one in the wide world knows how to get at it. Even great, rich, red-faced Mr. Cunningham had a heart, and his pretty die-away wife, into the bargain; though neither one nor the other made much use of it for any one being in the world, with the exception of their children. They were the loved ones,—the madly-cherished idols. They had but two, and at the time we are speaking of, one was no longer with them;—he had crossed the sea, and gone abroad ten years before. They tried hard to keep him in England, and he also tried hard at first, poor little fellow,—he was but seven years old,—and cried to remain behind; but it was useless, and at last they all yielded,—the parents with groans and agony, because they were obliged, and the child with a smile, as he glided out on the dark ocean, and then lay calm, snow-white, and rigid, shrouded in his small hammock for the journey he would never return,—no, nor ever wish to return from. Few would then have dared to say that either Mr. or Mrs. Cunningham were heartless. There were real tears shed at that time—real feelings were allowed to find vent; and there was a yearning desire to follow the little homeward

traveller one day on the lonely journey for which he had set out so smilingly, which, if acted upon, might have led to still higher aspirations. But the coffin was lowered out of sight,— the sorrow was smothered, not hallowed. Time passed on,— the world resumed its tyrant claims, and the child and its smile were among the things of the past,— they gilded not the hopes of the future.

Their daughter now came in for a double portion of the care and doting affection formerly shared with her brother. Her slightest wish became law,—no whim too absurd, no demand too *exigant*, for instant gratification, if within the bounds of the merest possibility. Over nursery—school-room—governess—papa and mamma—servants—horses—carriages—and everything else, did Augusta Cunningham reign with unlimited dominion,—true empress of all she surveyed. To her credit be it recorded, that she emerged from childhood, to the astonishment of all her acquaintance, with more than one engaging quality remaining as a set-off to her otherwise spoiled and self-willed character. She inherited the blunt sincerity of her father, with as little a portion of her mother's good looks as of her affectation; this, added to natural generosity and warmth of feeling, formed a refreshing contrast to Mrs. Cunningham's unreality; and though Augusta's ultra-sincerity of speech and manner often verged on positive want of decorum, yet of the two it was far the more attractive. She was more generally her father's companion than Mrs. Cunningham's, whose sentimental petting she detested; and the father and daughter were accustomed to walk and ride distances together which would quickly have destroyed the health of any woman troubled with a less hardy temperament than Miss Cunningham. The young lady took, fortunately, a wonderful fancy to Miss Templeton, and treated her with a considerably larger amount of courtesy and real kindness than she was

in the habit of bestowing on her richer and more fashionable acquaintance. She admired May's quiet independence and indifference to the world's opinion; it was precisely what she herself felt on the subject, said Miss Cunningham; she thought the world a thorough nuisance, and did not choose to submit to its decrees. May's notions of independence, however, differed widely from her pupil's; the latter ignored many of the wiser rules of society, simply because she personally disliked, and therefore chose to abuse, everything antagonistic to her own mode of action, — while May went quietly on from day to day, indifferent to the world's praise or blame, partly from ignorance, but in a still greater measure because, like all self-forgetful people, her actions, whether of greater or smaller import, were ever influenced by motives clear and transparent as the stars looking calmly down on the toilsome world they obediently illuminate, caring little, meanwhile, if in its supreme wisdom it is pleased to consider them so many other great toilsome worlds also, or whether, like the little child, afterwards one of England's favourite poets, is simple enough to believe they are but the "eyelet-holes to let the glory through."

So May Templeton went on with her task from one week's end to another, amused and more than content with Algie's flattery, who told her confidentially he was certain she must be very clever indeed to teach those two funny ladies, the one with the squeaking voice, who stopped so often in the middle of her songs to use that pretty glass smelling-bottle, and the great tall young lady who looked much older than she did, and said such rude, naughty things to her mamma.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Cor in cruce—crux in corde.”

THUS passed the winter. Each mail from India brought one of Arthur's three-page closely-written letters to his mother or sisters—bright, cheerful letters, full of good news about himself, and amusing anecdotes of the country. He was stationed within fifty miles of Calcutta, and had already made several friends. The young officer, a lad of sixteen, who had shared his cabin on their voyage out, and whose regiment happened, curiously enough, to be also stationed for the present at —, was his constant companion. The young cadet had taken a fancy to Arthur, for what reason it would be difficult to say; no two characters being apparently more opposite than that of the grave, thoughtful man, upon whose heart had already fallen the blight, and upon whose forehead was written the indelible marks of disappointment, and that of the giddy, thoughtless boy, who, with competency around him at home, and in ignorance of life's cares and sorrows, had chosen, in a fit of self-willed capriciousness, to enter the army, and see what the world was made of, leaving an only sister at home (he had lost both his parents) to weep over his absence till, as Charley Gordon said, she married and forgot him; he loved Ellen well enough, but he could not be tied to a girl's apron-string all the best years of his life. However that might be, whether true or otherwise, this assumed indifference to the said Ellen's feelings or wishes, it is certain that Arthur Templeton's principal attraction in Charley's eyes was a look Arthur once gave him, and a few words of advice he

had spoken during a short attack of illness the boy had been seized with on first landing in India. To use Charley's own words, "It was Ellen all over;" and Arthur rose more and more in his fellow-traveller's estimation from that day forward, while Arthur in his turn rejoiced at the opportunity thus afforded him of influencing one whose unformed and but too pliable character was as yet unstamped either for good or evil.

In Arthur's first letter to England, he gave a graphic account of St. Clair's and his journey to Malta, at which point he had parted from Lord St. Clair, who, instead of returning home according to the original intention, had found himself obliged to proceed to Constantinople, where he would probably be detained till the following spring.

One of the chief occurrences affording interest in the little family circle during the winter months was Algernon's having become a chorister at St. Mary's Church. His sweet voice had attracted the attention of the choirmaster, Mr. King, who without much difficulty obtained Mrs. Templeton's consent to enlist her little boy among the other choristers, a post Algernon looked upon as the veriest pinnacle of earthly happiness, and one withal he had little dared aspired to.

May's principal anxiety, and it was no light one, was in the fear, she could not help entertaining,¹ yet shrunk from acknowledging even to herself, of Mrs. Templeton's declining health. Rachel, as usual, more accustomed to glance at the surface of events, and see the bright side of every picture (a natural gift at sixteen—a supernatural one less than twenty years after), did not share her sister's apprehension. How, indeed, could she, poor child! May never, in the most distant manner, alluded to it; the idea of damping Rachel's spirits, unless forced to it by absolute necessity, being about the last idea likely to suggest itself

to her sister, and for the rest "mamma was so much more cheerful," as Rachel informed Arthur in her frequent budgets to India; "she was able now and then to walk in the park with her and Algie, and often of her own accord talked of Haseldyne and their past happiness there, with something like her old manner." Rachel did not remark the feverish colour invariably overspreading her mother's cheek after one of these retrospective conversations, or if she did, merely hailed with joy this symptom of returning convalescence.

One morning as Rachel was sitting in Mrs. Templeton's bedroom, May having departed immediately after breakfast to Mrs. Cunningham's house, who had lately taken a fit of early rising, and of fixing ten instead of eleven o'clock for music-lessons, a double knock at the door startled the invalid from the doze Rachel's reading had that moment lulled her into. One moment after, and Phœbe appeared, with a face from which she vainly attempted to banish the delight peeping out at every corner, to tell Miss Rachel that a gentleman wished to speak with her below, or if too early, he would call again.

"What is the gentleman's name, Phœbe?" inquired Rachel, as she followed her informant out of the room, after carefully drawing down the blinds, and waiting to see her mother once more relapse into slumber. "Is he a stranger? I wish May was at home; I am not used to seeing people; how tiresome to come and break dear mamma's sleep. Who can it be?"

"Lor', Miss Rachel, as if I could remember everybody's name!—it's quite impossible in London; you don't never hear what they call themselves half your time. But run down stairs, there's a pretty dear; you'll be obliged to 'pologize as it is for keeping him so long waiting."

Phœbe always thus addressed Rachel in nursery style.

"He's a good-looking sort of a man, and don't look as if he had over and above time to spare."

"But, Phœbe, my hair ; look what a figure I am ; do get me a clean collar."

"Stuff and nonsense, deary ; you looks beautiful, as you always did from the day you was borned, and I popped your first long white robe on to ye ; besides, Miss May always says it's a deal more genteel to go into the drawing-room a figure, as you call it, than to keep folks a-waiting, while you're a titivating yourself out up stairs."

"Well, you mind to give an eye to mamma, Phœbe, and put some coals on the fire ;" and Rachel ran down stairs, while the old nurse watched her over the banisters with beaming eyes, and began as usual to address her invisible listener. "It's a long lane, as 'as no turning, ain't it ? Ay, and it's a long prayer, as don't get no hearing either," were her words. "They'll be all right now he's come home, a noble fellow, won't they ? He'd break his heart if he was to see Miss May a-drudging out in the snow and rain as she's done all this blessed cold winter to earn a few pounds for the rest. "It's a pity though, ain't it, now, that she's not at home to-day ? She'll be finely disappointed, though, for all that, she won't let you see it—not she, bless you ! She's too still and quiet for crying and tearing about—she always was, as a child ! Miss Rachel, now, would have cried her pretty blue eyes as red as lobsters if she'd been out when he called ; but bless you, they're so different, them two. It always seems to me as if they were like two hangels a-getting ready for heaven—only Miss Rachel will fly about there all day long, with her long hair a-floating about on her shoulders ; and Miss May will kneel quite still, a-looking up as she do in the church yonder, at the picture of our Lady with God in her arms ; you may depend upon it that's how it will be."

Uninterrupted by the slightest contradiction to prolong the conversation, Phœbe went to put some coals on poor dear Missis's fire, and to steal on tip-toe round the bed, and gaze with saddened eye at the faded but still beautiful face, so full of health and happiness when Phœbe first knew it.

We will leave her there, and follow Rachel, who has meanwhile, with hesitating step, reached the drawing-room. She was naturally timid, and averse to enter society unless accompanied by her sister, and the idea of introducing herself to an entire stranger, and having to talk with him on some unknown—perhaps disagreeable—business, was more distasteful to poor Rachel than will easily be conceived by those among our young lady-readers, who, having been accustomed from five years old to attend "children's evening parties," have long ere the advanced age of sixteen lost the disagreeable sensation of shyness with which our present young lady turned the handle of the door.

The visitor within rose on her entrance, and advanced to meet her. "Dearest Rachel," he exclaimed, with emotion, "how very—very happy I am to see you again! But how you are grown and altered! I must leave off calling you Rachel now you are so tall, I suppose"—and he smiled, affectionately. "How are mamma and Algernon, and your sister—is she at home? Why, Rachel, is anything the matter?"—as Rachel, overcome with surprise and joy, burst into a flood of tears.

Lord St. Clair glanced with an indefinite feeling of fear and pain at her black dress—forgetting, for a moment, it was worn for her father.

"Oh no, no," said Rachel, trying to recover herself, "but it is such a surprise, and such—such great happiness to see you again."

"Dear child," said Lord St. Clair, taking her small hand

within his own, and drawing her towards him with a brother's caressing tenderness, "you little know how I have looked forward these eight long months to seeing you all again : but where are the others ? "

"Oh, poor mamma is not yet up ; she has been very ill, but is much better, and Algie has gone to school, and May will not be at home till the afternoon—how sorry she will be ! "

An expression of something more than mere disappointment crossed the young man's countenance, but Rachel did not perceive it. She listened with eager interest to the history of his adventures since they last met ; how he and Arthur had enjoyed their tour, and how much they had managed to see on the way, in spite of the limited period assigned for his arrival at Malta ; how he himself had been afterwards detained abroad while longing to be at home—he had reached London only the previous night, and had hurried to their house the first available moment. Lord St. Clair ended by saying how much he hoped they would often, very often, meet—he would call again, if possible, in a day or two, but was at present so overwhelmed with business, and had such a list of calls to get through ere he ran down for a week or so to Haseldyne, that he was perplexed where to begin.

Rachel stood by the window straining her eyes to catch a glimpse of his tall, slender figure, as he walked slowly down the street. "He does not seem in such a great hurry after all," thought the girl, as Lord St. Clair turned abruptly round to look once more, nay, to gaze earnestly towards Mrs. Templeton's house. Had he forgotten the number, or felt afraid to trust his memory without a second reconnoitre ? Or did his lordship wildly imagine, that like the Morgiana of Arabian Night notoriety, some invisible maiden, ere his next visit, would come unbidden in the

depths of night to mark all the houses with the same mysterious XXX. she would find engraved on Mrs. Templeton's? Or did he (wildest of all imaginations) really observe anything, either architecturally or artistically interesting in the little dingy three-storied erection of bricks and mortar just left behind him, that the young nobleman stood as we have said, gazing fixedly at No. XXX., Hamilton-street, till, suddenly raising his eyes to the drawing-room window, he caught a sight of Rachel.

"What a pretty creature she is," thought Lord St. Clair, as, with a smile and a kiss of the hand, he then hurried out of sight. Rachel, however, did not leave her post; she stood musing in silent reverie (a most unusual proceeding on the young lady's part), her bright cheek pressed tightly against the window-pane, her whole frame trembling with the excitement of the morning's interview. "Dear Lord St. Clair, how kind and good he is, I wonder if any one else in London is the least like him. In a day or two—that means the day after to-morrow I suppose; I hope May will be at home. How sorry she will be to have missed him, all through those tiresome singing-lessons." Thus ran her thoughts; and when Phœbe came in to inform her youthful mistress that mamma was awake and had inquired for her, Rachel started to find it was one o'clock: two hours had elapsed since she had left her mother's room, they appeared like two minutes. May did not return that day till late: she was, indeed, disappointed, on hearing what had occurred during her absence, very disappointed; but as Phœbe had prophesied, said little about it, and only remarked, with a smile, how pleasant it was to hear Lord St. Clair had returned safely, and how nice it was for Rachel to get such a long chat with him. She went on to say, that Mrs. Cunningham and her daughter were going out of town the following Tuesday, and had therefore engaged her musical

services for every day that week, as Miss Cunningham wished to learn some songs from the last new opera, and needed her assistance.

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Rachel; "then she would again miss Lord St. Clair."

May answered, with more quickness than was natural to her, that it did not signify; everything, some way or other, was sure to turn out for the best. That evening, as May was reading aloud to the rest, a note was handed to her, the contents of which drove the colour from her cheek. It was from her mother's solicitor, stating that a severe attack of gout prevented him from calling on Miss Templeton himself, and begging her to consult with his clerk the bearer of the note, on business which would not brook delay—painful business, over which, alas! he had no control. The note was written in evident suffering, the letters half formed, and more than one sentence left unfinished. May went on reading a few minutes as though nothing were the matter, first giving a message in a low tone to Phœbe; but finding her voice trembling, and a feeling of suffocation rising in her throat, she passed the book to Algernon, bidding him proceed with the tale, and slipped out of the room, motioning Rachel to take no notice of her absence. A very short and remarkably plain young man rose and bowed as she entered the parlour, and began at once to stammer out apology after apology for being the bearer of unpleasant news. Mr. Hardwicke would have come himself, but was confined to his bed by an illness which the news of this sad catastrophe had greatly augmented.

"What sad catastrophe?" inquired May, "she did not understand. Mr. Hardwicke's note was not explicit; he had directed her to consult Mr. Ellis, would he be kind enough to enter at once into an explanation?"

The young lawyer stammered and hesitated, and hesitated

and stammered, by turns, in a manner that would have tried the patience of even an indifferent listener, much less one whose every nerve was stretched to catch the meaning of his words; he at last, however, managed to make Miss Templeton understand that the bank in which her mother's little property was invested (the few thousand pounds settled on her at her marriage, and, therefore, of course, left untouched by her husband's creditors) had stopped payment, together with several others, owing to one of those fearful panics which occasionally sweep across the surface of commercial life in England, like the hurricane or earthquake of more distant lands, burying hundreds beneath their ruins. Mr. Ellis described the scene in the city as one terrible to witness—people were hurrying from one banking-house to another, with consternation written on their faces. Men of long standing, honour, and strict integrity, whose word had never been doubted, were now hiding themselves from sight. "On such men, indeed," said he, "the blow falls with double severity." Orphans, whose parents had died, leaving them, as they believed, securely provided for in the future, were now beggared in a moment. "It was impossible to guess at the extent of this dire calamity," continued Mr. Ellis, who seemed to consider this relation of other people's losses would divert Miss Templeton in some measure from the consideration of her own. "No one could say how many a home of luxury would be stripped, how many a family broken up and dispersed."

May listened to him with aching heart, and the throbbing in her head, sudden excitement, whether of joy or sorrow, always brought there. The pain had begun in the afternoon, on hearing the news of Lord St. Clair's arrival, and now became almost unbearable. She leant heavily forward on the table, trying to shade her eyes from the light, and also to

bring her thoughts and ideas into some sort of order before answering Mr. Ellis.

The young solicitor sat watching her, allowing his imagination meanwhile to rest, and form all kinds of wild and hopeless wishes — wishes, which, like too many others, begin and end in utter impossibilities; he had not yet acquired the wisdom of indifference to others' sorrow. It would have pained him to bear these tidings to any one, old lady or young, whether with grey hair, and time's wrinkles on her brow, or, if on the contrary, as in the present case, the ruined client happened to be a young and beautiful girl. It would be unfair, at the same time, to insinuate that the sight of that client's loveliness did not increase his regret.

Mr. Ellis was but human, to say nothing of a large amount of natural enthusiasm as yet unquenched by lawyer-like wisdom and prudence; he was very young withal, and in the long winter evenings, after sitting for hours in his lonely lodging studying law, was fain occasionally to regale his mental energies in building certain atmospheric palaces, of which sunny abodes May Templeton would, doubtless, from that night forward be the heroine and the queen. Not that in his sober senses poor little Ellis was ever vain enough to imagine himself the hero of the said romances, such bliss being in his lowly estimation reserved for individuals born under a more fortunate planet than himself; but Miss Templeton looks up, and Mr. Ellis is all attention. "Is there anything to be done, anything you can suggest?" she asked, almost mechanically, too stunned to realize the full extent of the blow. "I am not certain, I trust there may be a trifle rescued, a few shillings in the pound perhaps; we will do all we possibly can, rely upon it. It is a sad business; how I wish we could help you!" The tone in which the last words were uttered brought the tears into May's eyes, and relieved her head. They reminded her of Arthur.

Thus would he have spoken to any one under similar circumstances. "I am sure you would," was her reply, as she rose, with a wan smile, and held out her hand to the young clerk; "but I will not detain you now." Ah, if people did but know the magic power a kind look or a gentle word has of bestowing happiness, especially on the less gifted ones of this world, they would be less chary in the use of them.

Little Mr. Ellis, accustomed to snubbing and neglect—especially from the young-lady part of his acquaintance—went back to his lodgings that night with a lighter heart than heretofore, to pore over law-books, and work hard for his widowed mother—the only creature on earth who really cared for him, and who would not many years longer require the aid of his exertions.

"What a nice, kind fellow," thought May, as she slowly returned to the drawing-room; "his voice reminded me of Arthur. Oh! if he were but here. Alas! what is to be done? and how shall I keep it from my poor mother?" She stood for some moments outside the door ere she re-entered the room, and resumed her book. There was nothing in her manner to lead any one to suppose how much was amiss. It was even gayer than before; and when Rachel inquired, on their retiring to rest, the reason of her absence from the drawing-room, she replied that a young clerk had called on business not sufficiently interesting to talk about just then—they would consult together in the morning, or when at leisure.

Rachel, quieted by her information, fell asleep as usual; while May, neither asleep nor awake, lay by her side, her brain numbed by physical pain into that state of half-dreamy consciousness in which we suffer, and yet know not why—longing to escape from it, but lacking the power—lie encompassed at the same moment with the helplessness of sleep without its rest, and the activity of our waking

hours without the strength to grapple with their difficulties even by one single act of the will. She started up at length, and the weary brain, as if satisfied with that mockery of repose, once more resumed its sovereignty. Hour passed hour, and still it laboured on—thinking, thinking, thinking—each thought returning at the point at which it started, in one perpetual wearying circle. One idea, however, remained continually paramount: “Mamma must be kept in ignorance of this bitter sorrow—the last sands in her life’s brittle hour-glass would soon be spent—they must run out in peace.” This was easily said—easily determined; but how to act upon the loving “must” was the question.

The case appeared hopeless. The money received from her pupils, though a comfortable addition to their small income, enabling her to procure comforts for her mother she must otherwise have done without, would not possibly support them altogether. Even could she find a similar engagement to Mrs. Cunningham’s for the remaining days of the week, it would not suffice. Arthur would be able to assist them materially in a year or two, but the present—the present was the question.

May at length grew wearied out, as one suggestion after another arose for a moment, and then faded from her view. She longed for an hour’s, or even a few minutes’ sleep, with the indescribable yearning we have most of us experienced after a day of intolerable excitement. As morning began to dawn, and the first pale streak of light crept through the curtains, and rested on Rachel’s hushed and happy face, it appeared to May as though all the clocks from all the churches in London were striking together in some large square, and she standing in the midst, holding fast her splitting head to keep out the deafening noise. But gradually the sound changed into the sweetest melody, and

the bells from the Church of the Assumption, at Haseldyne, were chiming merrily. It was her father's wedding-day, and mamma was standing by his side, looking just as Rachel did when dressed in white for an evening party. Then the bells stopped, and there was unbroken silence. The priest was raising the Host, and papa was lying dead at the altar-step; but suddenly he rose to life, radiant with joy, and the bells once more rang out exultingly as the wedding train passed swiftly out of church. May followed them out of sight—whither, she knew not, for she was fast asleep; and upon waking, four hours afterwards, found Rachel standing by her side, with a cup of coffee and a plate of wafer bread-and-butter, cut by Rachel's own little hands for her darling May. It was useless to scold her, said Rachel, as May pointed reproachfully to her watch—she had looked so ill and tired, it was impossible to wake her in time to rise for breakfast—it was all owing to those tiresome music-lessons—Rachel was certain her sister overworked herself. May hastened to undeceive her on that point, saying she felt equal to three times the exertion; and then inquired if the paper had arrived. Yes; and will soon leave, too, depend upon it—she would read it aloud from beginning to end, while May finished her breakfast. And Rachel began in a merry voice at what she called the disconsolate column—"If this meets the eye of Sophia Jones, who is supposed to be drowned, she is implored by all she holds dearest to return to the bosom of her heart-broken family, or at all events to send the keys of the tea-caddy, which cannot be opened till she does, and causes great inconvenience. . . . Reginald!—return—return, and bygones shall be for ever bygones. Your cigar is on the mantel-shelf, where you left it, half burnt out, and your Wellington boots stand polished in the passage, 'wasting their sweetness on the desert air.'"

"Nonsense," cried May, laughing; "you are inventing, now. But Rachel, always merriest of the merry, seemed to-day in gayer spirits than ever, and continued reading, declaring positively it was all quite true.

May did not like to interrupt the ringing voice, spite of her longing to hear the advertisement column, fancying something therein might be worth answering. She looked fondly down on Rachel's childish form seated on the ground at her feet, the paper spread before her, trying to discover any piece of news to interest or amuse her sister. At last came the wished-for list of "wanted," and May listened eagerly, but, alas, nothing would "*do*."

"'The Queen and Prince Albert walked this morning on the slopes, accompanied by the little Princess Royal. Her Majesty wore a simple white bonnet, white veil, and dark blue silk mantle;' and here, May, is something in your line," said Rachel. "'Private concert at Hanover Square Rooms. Last evening Mademoiselle —— made her first *essai*; her songs were received with much applause, and encored more than once. We are not at liberty to gratify our readers' curiosity as to the name and parentage of this young lady, reasons affecting the welfare of her family having, it is rumoured, alone caused her appearance before the public.'"

"Poor thing, how I pity her!" and a grave look passed over the youthful reader's countenance; "it must be so terrible to sing before a public audience and crowd of strangers who neither know nor care about her. The more one loves music the worse it must be;—don't you think so, May?"

"The boy has come for the paper, Rachel," cried Algernon, running into the room, bag on shoulder, and fully equipped for school; "and Phoebe says mamma is waiting for you to go and talk to her."

Rachel was off like lightning, followed by Algernon, who first stopped to caress May, and ask leave to bring a favourite school-fellow home to play marbles with him; they would be very quiet, and not disturb mamma.

May arose and dressed quickly,—the darkness of the previous night, together with its hopeless sorrow, was passing away as a bright thought pierced the gloom.

“Why could not *she* too sing in public? Doubtless the lady just alluded to supported her family by this means. Why not follow her example? The remuneration could not be otherwise than high, or who would pass through such an ordeal to obtain it.” May was too thankfully aware of her musical talent (one, indeed, which without presumption might well claim the name of genius) to doubt her success. She knew that in this at least, the power to excel was her birthright—her very own. She would save her mother hardship and suffering,—her sister and Algernon the straits of poverty, or, worse still, dependence on others’ charity. One thought of self was listened to for an instant with something like a shudder. How would she endure what Rachel had so graphically described a few moments before, sensitive and reserved to a fault, as she was by nature. And pride, too, asserted its lofty voice, whispering loudly in her ear “professional — looked down upon — despised — worse even than a governess — a public singer—what would Lord St. Clair say if he even heard of it?—and Lady Adelaide—it was a want of proper pride and self-respect.” But the dark eyes were raised upward and then cast to the ground, while, with bended head, these words escaped her lips,—“*Who art thou?* and who am I?” Pride was silenced, there was no reply.

The next question was how to set about so novel an undertaking, and the answer was not far distant. Augusta would help her; she was the very person of all others to

assist in anything out of the common way; and how strangely fortunate that, contrary to the usual plan, Miss Cunningham had appointed her to be with her that morning. A feeling of intense relief—of indescribable repose crept over May's troubled spirit, as she kissed her mother's pallid cheek, and set out for her lonely and now well-known walk. Algernon was busy at school, and seldom able to accompany May. Rachel had charge of mamma, Phœbe engaged in household matters, and with more than enough already for one pair of hands to accomplish, even such a willing pair as Phœbe's; so May, like many another young lady, and pretty one into the bargain, was absolutely under the dire necessity of walking alone through the great wicked streets of great wicked London.

Augusta Cunningham could scarcely help remarking how her singing-mistress's voice trembled that morning; and once or twice, on looking up to ask a question, she saw tears standing in her eyes. After the lesson, Miss Templeton asked to speak to Miss Cunningham alone. Augusta was equally surprised and delighted; May had gained a wonderful influence over that wild and impetuous nature.

"Is there anything the matter, dear Miss Templeton?" she exclaimed with affectionate impulse, dragging rather than inviting the latter into her own bedroom. "I am certain you are unhappy. Is there any earthly thing I can do to assist you? I would go all over this detestable London for your sake, and that is saying a good deal for 'Miss Number One,' as my sixth nurse, unhappy woman, on one luckless occasion ventured to call little Miss Augusta Cunningham, and was dismissed for her pains the same evening.

May explained how unforeseen circumstances obliged her for the present entirely to support her family, mentioning her ideas of singing in public. Could Miss Cunningham

give her any information as to the best mode of obtaining an introduction into the musical world?

Augusta sprang to her feet, seizing the poker from the fender, brandishing it in the air, — a favourite amusement with that young lady when under the influence of any new excitement, and often a safety-valve for a less harmless display of feeling.

“Capital! the very thing, of course;” and she marched up and down the room, talking by turns to herself and her companion. “We know lots of those musical people, and mamma makes such a fuss with them, they are ready to do any and every thing they are asked. Why, you might make your fortune in a year or two with that lovely voice. I’ll settle it all. Let me see; — what’s the best way? I have a good mind to order the carriage and drive off to Signor Thingummy, the manager of the concert-rooms, this very minute; but then he might be out; of course he would, if he was particularly wanted to be at home, — people always are, and *vice versa*, which, of the two, is far worse. Oh, stop, — I have it now! — how stupid not to remember that before. We are going to have a horrible party here to-morrow evening, and he shall be invited. Woe betide him if he dare refuse; — and then you — yes, that is the nicest way — you must come too, and sing all your best songs; and if the man does not jump at the chance of having such an addition to his choir this season, why he is a born idiot, and I shall tell him so.”

May expressed her thanks with much warmth, and tried hard to repress a sigh; but Augusta’s quick ear caught the sound, and she changed her boisterous tone.

“Ah! I forgot Miss Templeton, how different we are from one another; what is fun to me is death to you, like the frogs in Æsop’s fables. And yet I should have thought that to one who sings as you do, the idea of exercising such

fascination over the hearts of others must be downright delicious."

"Oh, indeed," said May, laughing. "Then I'm afraid you will consider me a miserable delinquent, when I confess, with all due sorrow, that the attractions of pounds, shillings, and pence far outweigh, in my depraved mind, the more ethereal, but in the literal sense of the words *poorer* baubles of fame, you allude to——"

"Well, you're a queer body altogether," said Augusta, restoring the poker to its original resting-place, and unlocking a large dressing-case, standing on her toilet-table,—“I wonder whether you will be offended at what I am going to do now, because if you are, say so, and I will attempt an apology. But, the fact is, I have now more pocket-money than I know what on earth to do with, so to please papa—whom, between ourselves, I have a small degree of affection for—I amuse him and myself by buying jewellery, wear it once or twice, to set off my ugly face, and then buy new the next time we go shopping together. Now, if you really do not mind accepting some of this pretty rubbish, and getting your maid to dispose of it (and she put rings and brooches worth some £30 or £40 into May's hands), you will confer an immense obligation on your humble servant."

"But," said May, blushing and hesitating,—“your mamma—would she like it?”

"Botheration!" cried Augusta, in a tone of mingled indignation and amusement; "what, in the name of all that's outrageous, has my mamma to do with my jewels or anything else? Don't you know I'm of age, and a young lady of large expectations—as the gentlemen of empty hearts and empty purses call me, when, deep in meditation and debt, they reflect whether on mature and matter-of-fact consideration, it might not be possible—just possible, to

wander along life's dusty road by the side of anything so *gauche*, and devoid of loveliness, as Augusta Cunningham! If she were but a *trifle* better looking, they would not hesitate another hour in making her heart dance for joy, by throwing themselves at her feet—great, awkward feet, and even as it is—bitter as the pill would be—now please don't spoil yourself by contradicting me"—as May was about to speak. "Let me have the felicity of believing there is still one person in the world who can be at once truthful and disinterested, except, to be sure, that for the sake of variety, it would be pleasant for once to hear Miss Templeton be, as society calls it—'a little inaccurate.' Well, then, you really think me a beauty—with charming manners to boot, &c. &c. &c.—thank you a thousand times, Miss Templeton, I appreciate your praise beyond the power of language to express."

"What a silly girl you are, Augusta, who else would have ventured on such words? You know quite well that I think you neither pretty——"

"Nor charming," chimed in Augusta, with a loud but not displeasing laugh—"that is May Templeton all over. Go on, it does me a world of good."

"You misconstrue my meaning," replied May, gravely; "I was about to say, only you interrupted me, that you might be far more than either of these, if you chose—look here!"—and she held up to the light a string of pearls Miss Cunningham had given her among the other trinkets,—"why not be as beautiful?"

"With all the pleasure in the world," said Augusta, abruptly; "if I knew where to buy the proper cosmetics—but I see what you are driving at,—I am wide awake. You mean the beauty of religion and goodness, and all that—but to be an angel is not in my line. It sits very well on you, but—O, ye gods and goddesses! fancy Augusta Cunning-

ham attempting the angelic!—why at every look reflected in the glass she would be tempted to imagine what a frightful place heaven must be, if that face is to be a specimen of its inhabitants.”

“Hush, Augusta, you should not, even in jest, use such words.”

“Then you should not provoke me into it by talking of impossibilities.”

“There is no such word as impossibility in the science I alluded to—so, at least, says an old-fashioned book we are both well acquainted with.”

“What old-fashioned book do you mean? I never read any but the last new ones. You don’t mean the *Bible*? Why, I thought you were a Catholic, Miss Templeton!”

“Well, and what then, Augusta?”

“Why, I always heard they never read, or so much as look into it.”

“And you *believed* this?” asked May, incredulously.

“Yes, of course I did—that is, I neither believed nor disbelieved it; because I never troubled my brains on the subject.”

“How very strange,” said May. “But, surely——”

“I tell you I never troubled myself on the subject till I knew you, and since then I have often thought that people who do not read the Bible are better Christians than those who do. It strikes me that you obey it, and that is the chief business, after all, I suppose;—but we have had quite enough about religion for one day, and I must go and write to Signor Spagnetelli. Now, pray don’t begin on the mamma subject again. Rest assured, that on hearing who is going to be *prima donna* of the fashionable concerts this spring, your star will be in the ascendant in that quarter of her Majesty’s kingdom. Good-bye—no more sermons; remember to-morrow evening—white muslin at nine o’clock,

unless you hear to the contrary, which shan't happen, if I can help it."

When May reached home, she found Lord St. Clair had again called—she felt glad now to have missed seeing him. It would have been as painful to have concealed as to have confessed the difficulties they were labouring under, and still more so of the means by which she intended to overcome them. No feeling of shame dictated this repugnance. There was, perhaps, no one in the world whose decision, as to the right or wrong of her determination, May less feared. The feeling arose from an instinctive knowledge of the pain it would cause Lord St. Clair to hear that stern necessity obliged her to contemplate an undertaking he was well aware she would shrink from more than any power would ever persuade her to acknowledge—why, for the sake of a little sympathy, however precious, give him distress who had spent his boyish days by dear Arthur's side, and never let pass an opportunity of giving Rachel and herself pleasure? All May's powers of persuasion had to be exercised ere she could get Rachel to consent quietly to the foregoing arrangement, and to assist in concealing it from her mother. Rachel wept herself into hysterics at the idea of her beautiful—her darling—her precious May, doing such a dreadful, awful, unheard-of thing as to sing in public. It was all Rachel's fault, for reading about that poor lady in the morning—this, and this alone, had put it into May's head. "She was always doing wrong," sobbed Rachel; "she was of no use to anybody. If May was to work so hard, why not she? It was cruel not to let her try."

In vain did her sister point out the unreasonableness of such words. Rachel's own delicate health, which, if impaired, would be another burden, the real unselfishness on her part of remaining at home, and taking care of their mother; poor Rachel, like many other kind-hearted, but impulsive people,

could only see matters through her own microscope ; she was certain she *ought* to help towards their support, but what could she do?—she was miserable, she would tell Lord St. Clair how wretched it made her,—he always sympathized in her joys or sorrows, though no one else thought it worth while to do so ; and then, pierced to the heart by her own injustice and her sister's look of suffering, Rachel flung her arms round May's neck, unsaying her words, sobbing for forgiveness, and promising obedience to everything, if May would only believe in her love, and not think her the most cruel, hard-hearted creature in the wide world. At length, by dint of protestations and caresses, always with Rachel a component part of true affection, May succeeded in calming down the state of miserable excitement of which her visit to Miss Cunningham had been the unwilling cause, and also in persuading Rachel to believe the real fact of the case, remarking, that without her daily co-operation and contrivance concealment would be impossible, and their poor mother the sufferer, as she must then necessarily be acquainted with the story of their loss, instead of remaining in the state of happy ignorance their united efforts might contrive to keep her in. Some of the concerts would take place in the morning, and be therefore less difficult to attend without Mrs. Templeton's knowledge ; those in the evening would be the grand difficulty ; Phœbe and Algernon must both be admitted to the secret,—each would be an assistant in their different ways.

Phœbe, for a wonder, made small opposition to a sacrifice, the value of which she had enough appreciation of her young mistress's character fully to understand ; she gave a grunt of acquiescence when informed of her part in the little family drama, consoling herself by a knowing wink at her silent companion, and an intimation of "its not lasting *long*,—there was them, many miles off, thank God, as would no

more allow of no such a thing than they'd cut their heads off; ah! they'd find it out, sooner or later, for all she'd been fool enough to promise Miss May not to tell nobody; she was too much flabbergasted with the news to refuse her; never mind, there was other folks as had eyes as sharp as hers was, and as partial to them, pretty dears, as herself; not forgetting neither their being lords and ladies, in place of a poor old country woman; but as to them bankers and lawyers," said Phœbe, shaking her fist, "there was no word in Johnson's dictionary as was bad enough for 'em, a set of thieves and rascals, pretending to take care of your money as long as they've a mind, and then, all on a heap, neither with your leave nor by your leave, a-shutting up their big counting-houses as they called 'em, and telling you, cool as a cucumber, they hadn't got a penny of it left; she never heered tell of such a trick afore, never; she only wished she'd got the scoundrel as had served her poor mistress out that shabby way down in that there kitchen a-sitting opposite to the fire, she'd tell him a bit of her mind, and no mistake."

Little Algernon, with the intuitive delicacy of feeling some children appear gifted with from infancy, comprehended the whole affair long ere his sister had concluded her instructions about draughts and backgammon, and trying to teach mamma chess in the evenings she was absent, so that she might miss her as little as possible. His one word, "Oh, May! how I wish I were a man," as he looked up pityingly into her face, almost overcame his sister's equanimity; but she replied, with a kiss, that his wish would soon be granted, for the months and weeks and days were passing by very quickly, nearly as quickly as the railway train he was so fond of watching as he came home from school.

Miss Cunningham proved herself a true prophetess; Signor Spagnotelli professed himself enchanted with Miss Templeton's voice and style, as Augusta intended him to be, and

still more so on hearing he might avail himself of the young lady's talent no less for his own than for her own benefit. He at once proposed an engagement for the ensuing year, offering higher terms than even Miss Cunningham expected, and quite beyond May's most sanguine hopes. His offer was only too thankfully accepted, and after a few necessary preliminaries, the following Tuesday evening was fixed for Miss Templeton's first appearance before the criticising eye of a fashionable London audience.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Who scornful pass it with averted eye,
'Twill crush them by-and-by."—KEBLE.

AND where is Lady Adelaide all this time? Has she forgotten her promise to Arthur Templeton, given so earnestly that last bright evening at Haseldyne's—like others, out of sight out of mind, young ladies of our acquaintance? No. Lady Adelaide, with all her faults, and, to judge from her own account, they are not few in number, seldom forgets a promise, least of all one given at such a time: she often writes to Arthur's sisters, still more frequently thinks of them in her silent hours, or when wandering among the primrose-decorated lanes, and fair woodland scenery, upon whose every tree and meadow, flower and stream, the image of her childhood's companions appears as it were daguerreotyped; but why is the gaiety-loving Lady Adelaide still in the dull country, when London, and its unusually early season, has long ago claimed her presence? Why? Oh, Belgravia! we reply in answer to your indignant inquiry, only because engaged in that most absorbing of all pursuits a fashionable courtship. Lady Adelaide Morley was, as the villagers of Haseldyne announced to the villagers of the neighbouring parish, "a-going to get married afore the summer was out; and wouldn't there be grand doings up at the big house on her ladyship's wedding day, to be sure!"

May Templeton, greatly to her surprise, was informed abruptly of this interesting fact in her gay friend's last letter from the Park. It had never occurred to her that Adelaide would marry so very early in life: she half regretted it for

Lord St. Clair's sake ; he and Adelaide were a more than ordinarily attached brother and sister, such companions to each other ; and married sisters were, without any fault of their own, so different from single. Besides this, there was something in the tone of Adelaide's letter announcing her engagement, which jarred painfully, she scarcely knew why, on May's feelings. Adelaide could not surely be happy, to write in that light, almost flippant style on a subject, surely, of all others, the holiest and most sacred to a woman's heart ; and yet, on a second perusal of Adelaide's letter, there was not a word or expression to denote *unhappiness* ; on the contrary, it was bright, gay, and sparkling :—she hoped soon to be in town, and should seize the first opportunity of hunting her old friends up, and dragging them, whether by choice or not, out of the retirement in which she made no doubt they had buried themselves. They must come with her ; May and Rachel must see the world—the *real* world. They would soon be reckoned among its brightest constellations, and it was pleasant to shine, if but for a moment ; and after that they must follow her example, marry, and have a home of their own ; thus putting an end to all their difficulties. A woman who married well had fulfilled her destiny. May stopped here, and sought to bring to mind where and by whom she had heard these three last words spoken before. Oh, it was by Arthur, when repeating to her Father Paul's parting instructions to himself, and what *he* considered “fulfilling one's destiny ;” and then Adelaide wandered off into rhapsodies on her future husband's external attractions, his manners and appearance, and last, not least, his devotion, almost idolatry, to herself ; all the more fascinating because, generally speaking, her lover was reserved in ladies' society, and seldom took pains to make himself agreeable. Altogether, May fancied, or at least hoped, her first impression might have

been a mistaken one; at all events, she would suspend her judgment till Lady Adelaide's arrival in town. People were not always reflected in their letters—light words were not unfrequently a cloak for deeper feelings, especially in Lady Adelaide's case, whose heart was seldom worn upon her sleeve. May's first supposition, however, was the right one, in spite of her persevering efforts to think differently. Lady Adelaide was not happy, in the true sense of that ill-treated word, cleverly as she succeeded in persuading both herself and others to the contrary. The deception was not more wilful than such deceptions are wont to be,—she was simply on the eve of attempting what, in one way, if not in another, few of us but have wasted the better half of our lives in attempting—a daring and fruitless experiment. Past generations set, and future ones will doubtless follow, her example, and buy their experience at the same tremendous rate of discount—a lifetime's unavailing regret. Well for all if, ere morning dawn o'er the horizon of the eternal future, they shed one tear of contrition on the self-chosen pathway!

Lady Adelaide must needs lay down at eighteen a confessedly heavy, and yet to her by no means insurmountable or irremediable burden, to embrace with deliberate wilfulness one which no power in heaven or earth might ever ease her burdened shoulders from carrying, in the rash hope of thereby attaining the phantom happiness, in search of which, spite of wind or contrary current, fear of shipwreck or loss of harbour, warning from within or counsel from without, she had madly set sail and launched out to discover.

The Countess of Morley was a clever woman, and withal an industrious one, under any circumstances of sufficient moment to require her personal superintendence, whether in the care of her own or interference with other people's affairs. Fond of her own way, and persevering in the

effort to obtain it; madly ambitious for her children's aggrandisement, as unscrupulous in over-stepping all intervening obstacles, real or imaginary, between them and its attainment,—the countess had fully made up her mind, as we remarked, on our readers' first introduction to this lady, as to her stepdaughter's marriage and consequent departure from Haseldyne, and that at no distant period, however much the party concerned might have preferred a few more years of girlhood, and freedom from care, under her father's roof. No stone was left unturned, no stratagem considered unlawful, to gain the desired end. The stage was taken by a skilful actress, and her part played out to the end with a steadiness and pertinacity worthy a better cause. No word ever escaped the countess's lips that might by the least possibility put Lady Adelaide on her guard. The subject of marriage was rarely, if ever, introduced, and when casually started, in allusion to some local or family event, always put aside by her ladyship with an expression of indifference or disdain. People were always marrying or given in marriage—the world seemed to think of nothing else. The moment a girl set her foot outside the school-room door, she must, forsooth, look out for a home of her own, in which to rule others and have her own way. Obedience to parental authority was a virtue going daily more and more out of fashion. She would take good care *her* children—dear little things—were not brought up with such false notions. *Her* daughters should be at least three or four and twenty ere they presumed to talk to her about marriage, or allowed themselves to get entangled in the wilful and heartless flirtations some young people of her acquaintance appeared to consider no little merit if continually engaged in, instead of feeling, as any person of right principle ought to feel, thoroughly ashamed of. Lady Adelaide, fitful and irritable in disposition, as

guileless and unsuspecting, was completely ensnared by these innuendoes on her conduct in these matters—innocent as, for the most part, it might truthfully be called. Her natural generosity of character, though obscured by a faulty and imperfect education, was far above the petty and miserable vanity of a “flirtation” in the countess’s sense of the word; and though, like other unreflective and heedless men and women, Adelaide found herself more than once under the necessity of opening her eyes to the fact of having given pain, the fault was even more regretfully mourned over than carelessly committed; but to hear her shortcomings spoken of in *this* way, was at once untrue and unpardonable. The countess had gained her vantage-ground and despaired less than ever of speedy victory. Lady Adelaide’s quick temper was pained, her pride bitterly wounded. Who should dare to interfere with her actions, least of all in the insulting way of sarcastic innuendo? An open rebuke, even if undeserved, she could have borne with better grace; but not this. Marriage, indeed! the idea had never entered her head, excepting as a future probability, one which might be contemplated three or four years to come, perhaps. She never intended to be in a hurry on the subject. No need to instruct her on that point; and yet—yet, why not, forsooth? Why should one woman set up her opinion and dictate in that absurd manner to the rest of the world? Why not marry early in life, if people chose—if they liked to undertake the cares and responsibilities of a household? No concern of any one else’s, with the exception perhaps of one’s own father or mother; and as to that, *her* mother had married at seventeen,—a year younger than herself, and papa would never dream of interfering in such matters, or, indeed, in any at all; and if *he* did not, who else had a right? These were the rebellious thoughts awakened from time to time in the swelling bosom of the indignant

girl, after remaining a silent listener to remarks all the more aggravating because addressed to no one in particular, and for this reason far too untangible to be personally resented.

The angry feelings, however, aroused by the countess might not have rankled so deeply as to have led ultimately to any miserable result, had not the said feelings been lashed into action by other and more homely causes of annoyance. Lady Adelaide discovered, as month by month passed along, how every—even the most private actions of her life—were canvassed, commented upon, and made the subject of petty gossip, not only by far and near relatives, but also by the casual visitors spending a few days at the Park. Nor was Lady Adelaide long without discovering the cause of this annoyance,—to whom, indeed, but one person, the only one, in fact, intimately acquainted with her daily pursuits and domestic life, could it be ascribed, and for what possible motive, save that of idle gossip, were her sayings and doings in the sacred retirement of her home to be thus dragged into public notice,—to be thus dissected and pulled to pieces by those who no more understood the hidden current gliding on beneath the surface of her external actions, than they comprehended, or, indeed, cared to fathom, the meaning of a thousand other mysteries daily passing before the outward eye? Proud contempt for a while closed the lips that would otherwise have sought relief from this system of impertinent espionage by passionate remonstrance with the well-guessed-at author of its existence. A tone of haughty opposition, if anything like maternal interference (maliciously as the dose was, when occasion offered, administered) crossed her pathway, was the only indication on the part of the once affectionate Lady Adelaide, of her changed feeling towards the countess. Once, and once only, in a fit of resentment amounting to fury, did Adelaide seek an interview with and lay the case before her father; but to her equal surprise and

disgust, the expected sympathy was absent—the appeal had been foreseen — the ground prepared against her arrival. Too indolent to care for grievances not immediately affecting his own individual comfort, and of whose unreasonableness and girlish folly he had been forewarned with a want of truthfulness singularly adapted to the plot in hand, the earl merely replied to his daughter's bitter complaints and entreaties for interference, that he really and positively could not meddle in such nonsensical matters; he did not understand anything about it; women would talk,—their lives were made up of gossiping, it was a part of their nature, young and old, high and low, rich and poor; *he* believed they were all alike. She was a foolish girl to trouble her head about it; why not gossip in return? or else let them talk till they were weary. He was sure people might say precisely what they liked about himself, and tell all the falsehoods they were capable of inventing, so long as they kept out of his sight. It was hard upon him to be thus tormented and worried with domestic annoyances at his time of life, when he might justly be looking for calmness and repose.

Lady Adelaide quitted the room in silence; her father, with all his indifference to others, had never thus repelled her before,—the pet and darling of his more unselfish hours. Alas, if self's worshippers did but know the worth of the love they sacrifice—if but for their *own* sakes they did but know its priceless value! Lady Adelaide never again, by word or look, or even thought, sought the sympathy thus coldly and unjustly denied to her. Come weal, come woe, her joys or sorrows should henceforth be masked from a father's eye. A mother's gentle one had closed ere she knew of its love. She was "dead and *gone*." No longer watching over her with a fonder glance than earthly mothers o'er their first-born's helpless smile — no longer pleading

Sir Allen's motive, however, whatever that might be, appeared sufficiently worth the trouble, to judge from the unceasing pains and continued self-control employed in the attempt, and rewarded ere long by its astonishing success. With the countess he was, from the first moment of their mutual introduction at a country ball in the neighbourhood, on the best possible terms ; some peculiar attraction appeared to exist between the two from that day forth. This was in part accounted for by the fact of Sir Allen's being already acquainted, so slightly, indeed, as scarcely to deserve the name of acquaintance, with Lady Adelaide, the countess's step-daughter, with whose face, fortune, and position, as the eldest daughter of the Earl of Morley, he had at the last London season fallen deeply in love.

Sir Allen, although still a young man, was a widower of some years' standing. His wife had died in Italy, the country of her birth, and their only child, a girl, had since her death been a boarder in a convent in the city in which her parents had resided during the last year or two of her mother's lifetime. Not that Sir Allen was a Catholic, but rumour declared—only rumour is apt to be misinformed—that the gay baronet's disappointment in not having a son to inherit his name and estate, which, in default of male heirs, passed into other hands, had been visited in some measure on the unoffending heads of his wife and child, and that, in consequence, the latter had been placed in a foreign convent, simply as an excuse to the world for not bringing her with him to England, and having continually before him the presence of an unloved, uncared-for child. It was whispered, moreover, that Sir Allen's conduct to his wife had gone somewhat beyond the bounds of mere neglect and want of affection ; but from her not having spent a sufficiently long period in England to form any but the most casual acquaintances, little was really known

either of the Italian lady's antecedents or her married life;—and, after all, what signified the past? said the world—let it chant its own dirge;—the present, and the present's enjoyment, was the grand concern of life. Sir Allen Mansfield was young, wealthy, and extravagantly hospitable, he must be dealt with leniently as regarded the past—young men would be young men, all the world over—no one expected them to be faultless. The wife story did not sound fascinating; but doubtless there were innumerable excuses—Italian women were proverbially excitable. No doubt, Sir Allen had suffered deeply on his part for the imprudence and folly of marrying a foreign lady in preference to one of his own countrywomen. Society, when reviewing his shortcomings, simply guessed at from the communications of those mystified newsmongers commonly designated “birds of the air,” appeared to have become deeply endowed with the spirit of that Divine Charity which neither thinketh nor speaketh evil of its neighbour. At the head of the non-calumniators stood pre-eminently forward the Countess of Morley. No one, in her hearing, ever spoke disparagingly of her absent *friend*—the latter word was advisedly emphasized—Sir Allen Mansfield. His attractive manners, openness of purpose, and general amiability of character, formed her perpetual theme when conversing on the subject with the earl, or strangers,—not, however, in the presence of Lady Adelaide: that rarest of all qualities—we were about to say virtues—*tact*, was one among the many other useful—nay, admirable accomplishments, the countess had learned by heart. To have eulogized Sir Allen, under the present state of feeling existing between herself and Lady Adelaide, in the presence of the latter, would have been, indeed, to defeat her own purposes. True, the bare facts of Sir Allen Mansfield's past life, so far as his unfortunate marriage was concerned, reached the ears of both the earl and his daughter solely

through the medium of her ladyship's casual communications; but they reached those ears stripped from each particle of their native ugliness; for the rest, a death-like silence prevailed in the charmed circle of Haseldyne Park as to Sir Allen's merits or demerits, from the moment the true motive of his frequent and long-protracted visits there became visible to the watchful eye, ever on the look-out for a sufficiently tempting bait wherewith to angle in the Lady Adelaide's vicinity. The expectations of the countess, however, though destined, unfortunately, to meet with too true a realization in the end, were not to be fulfilled in the commencement without many an apparent failure and aggravating disappointment. Sir Allen Mansfield, with all his accomplishments, was not, if left to her unbiassed self, the man either to attract the regard, or win the esteem, of Lord St. Clair's sister—a girl accustomed from her childhood first to reverence, and then to love, the few chosen ones upon whom her passionate heart had ever deigned to bestow affection. A complete man of the world, and habituated to sway the will, if not the hearts of those brought in contact with himself, Sir Allen succeeded for a while in dazzling the intellect and interesting the lighter part of Lady Adelaide's character; but on his attempting, after a month or two of the constant and familiar intercourse country-house visiting is so well skilled in affording, to strike a deeper chord, the looked-for notes were mute;—they refused response. Touched by the wrong musician, they yielded no sound save the rattling, inharmonious one of a cold gratitude—a regretful obligation. Better had she remained so—yea, far better, even had the right musician been for ever absent. Far more blessed, a thousandfold, even if doomed to pass silently to its grave, the true, though lonely heart, than the one whose spirit melody has been changed, wilfully metamorphosed, into a tuneless discord.

Lady Adelaide shrank back, distressed and in surprise—had not intended—never, indeed, dreamt of the pain Sir Allen's manner, more than his words, accused her of having inflicted; “pleaded—and accompanied the plea—not guilty, to *him* with gentleness and sincerity, to *herself*, with a sort of angry reproach for not having been more circumspect and reserved in her demeanour; only it was so tiresome, so *very* tiresome, one might not be friends with one's gentlemen acquaintance without all this falling in and out of love, and giving pain and breaking hearts, the very last thing in the world she had any ambition to accomplish. Lady Adelaide's self-reproach, for once in her life, however, might have been dispensed with. She had inspired anger, but had not given pain. That is reserved for the tender-hearted and foolish ones of the earth, who suffer in exact proportion to their capacity for imbibing sorrow.

Sir Allen's first feeling, after the first surprise at his rejection had passed by,—for no man ever more confidently expected an opposite result,—was one of mingled pique and bitter indignation at the manner in which his lady-love had dared to trifle, not with his affections (he would have forgiven that, had they existed), but with the attentions he had bestowed so much time and thought in lavishing upon her individually, and in propitiating the earl her father. She had mortified him beyond the hope of forgiveness; and if human power of no ordinary determination would attain its object, he would be revenged. The advantages of making Adelaide his wife, instead of diminishing, were but enhanced by her refusal—the fiercer the struggle the more gallant the victory. He would not be baffled without a desperate contest, and a well-laid plot to insure success; he would overcome every obstacle, man, woman, or demon might throw between him and the haughty woman, who, strange to say, now held a sort of fascinating influence over the heart to

which such unwonted apathy was all but a miraculous novelty.

Assuming an appearance of sorrow and quiet resignation, more calculated than any other perhaps to interest and subdue a woman's feelings, Sir Allen accepted his rejection, and expressing much regret for having caused the object of his attachment a moment's annoyance, alleged his intention of withdrawing immediately, at least for the present, from the neighbourhood of Haseldyne. He had but two requests to make ere his departure, and they were easily conceded by Lady Adelaide. The first was a promise of continued friendship with herself, and the latter of entire concealment (if incurring no sacrifice of principle in her straightforward and sensitive mind) of his unhappy proposal from her father and the countess, more especially from the latter, as he feared (so Sir Allen informed Lady Adelaide) that, for some reason or another, he was no "favourite with her mother." She had treated him, more particularly of late, in a manner that, had it not been for his attachment to herself and the earl's repeated invitations to prolong his stay at the Park, would have caused his departure long ere this from a house where, with the hostess, he was too evidently an unwelcome guest. Of course, if Lady Adelaide had any scruple as to not informing the countess of his rejection, Sir Allen would be the last to interfere, although, under these circumstances, he felt grieved to decide that his acquaintance with the family must come to a final close ; he had not sufficient humility, alas ! he must confess it, to brook the glance of her ladyship's eye under such circumstances. There was but one in the world who had ever humbled him unresented. One who possessed, and had now used, the power of crushing his fiery spirit to the dust, and yet one over whom memory must ever throw the bright veil of reverence and affection.

The old adage advising every one, if possible, "to kill two birds with one stone," was not exalted industry enough for Sir Allen's imitation. His sportsmanship could be satisfied with no less than a whole covey; nor did his hardihood go unrewarded. It would be difficult to say whether emotions of pride, pity, resentment, or sorrow became the more vividly impressed on Lady Adelaide's mind by Sir Allen's farewell remarks, so rapidly did they pursue one another through her mind. The idea of any want of courtesy having been allowed to APPEAR (even if unjustly *felt*) towards one of her father's most favoured guests—one, moreover, who, until this unfortunate occurrence, had been numbered among her own immediate friends, was atrocious, nay, insulting, and all borne so quietly and with such self-forgotten cheerfulness, even gaiety of manner, for her sake, and by so proud a man withal. There was no sin Adelaide had so much sympathy with in any shape as pride. To her eyes this fault was, if we may use the expression, a "glorious imperfection," and, in spite of St. Clair's scepticism as to anything imperfect being considered glorious, she maintained her ground; nor was Sir Allen ignorant of this peculiarity. What a humiliating situation had he not been placed in, whispered the voice of imagination to Lady Adelaide. And then, after all, to be cruelly disappointed; she could not have believed, but for this event, the clever yet frivolous companion of the last two or three months, capable of so deep and disinterested an attachment. What a pity they had ever met. "No favourite with the *countess*!"—that was strange, passing strange. She had always, somehow or other, fancied the contrary, though, on looking back, Adelaide certainly never once in her life remembered hearing Lady Morley speak either well or otherwise of Sir Allen. Indeed, she had often appeared to ignore, or at least overlook, his existence, among the list of

tiresome people so infinitely inferior with whom her ladyship was surrounded.

"No matter," muttered Adelaide, "or rather, all the more matter, why the Earl of Morley's daughter should never again, as far as *her* exertions went, allow Sir Allen, or any other of her father's guests, to fancy themselves *de trop* at Haseldyne Park;—Sir Allen, too, had always from the first paid such attention to her father, beyond what courtsey required." Here a blush rose to Adelaide's face, as the probable motive of that attention was remembered; but what woman would blame a man for his love? and besides, others with similar wishes as regarded herself had never thought it worth while to interest themselves with the old man, whose unfriendly and frigid manner had repelled all but a very few indeed from his side; there were scarcely any, in fact,—nay, she knew no one,—with whom the earl appeared on such agreeable, pleasant terms as with Sir Allen. What a pity she could not like him, that is, like him sufficiently; but this feeling at least was not under her control,—it was impossible, it would be wrong, sinful;—no, she never could, and so help her Heaven, she never would, marry a man to whom she did not freely give the deep heart full of love and reverence her nature was so terribly capable of bestowing—yes, terribly capable; for terrible, indeed, in this world is the power of loving—loving as she could love. Well for those who may be able individually to contradict the assertion; let them at least pass it by uncriticised. No, she never would, and once again, as though to fence up the resolution, did she take the solemn vow and seal it with the awful name—"So help her God, she never would, except with her whole heart's glad love, call any man her husband." The words, though registered on high, were quickly forgotten by the speaker.

That day six months Lady Adelaide was the betrothed wife of Sir Allen Mansfield, not under the delusion beneath

the shelter of which many such a betrothal may take refuge,—that of an imaginary affection, or supposed duty (as if one duty was ever meant to grow out of another's ashes), of obedience to an earthly parent, that to a heavenly one being unintentionally placed secondary,—to none of these, innocently false as they may be called, might the Lady Adelaide apply for justification. Her only appeal (for conscience peremptorily demanded one) was to the giddy, thoughtless multitude; she was but going to follow the rest of the world, make a good match, and in her case escape at the same time from present annoyances. Had Lord St. Clair been in England, the influence he possessed, beyond any other, with his sister, as well as a strict scrutiny into Sir Allen's character, might have availed to snatch his Adelaide from the precipice along whose brink she had wandered thus rashly; yet is it not ever in some such way as this we blindly reason,—Had so and so happened or not happened, how different might our life's history have been? Had the serpent never entered the garden, we should all have been in paradise. Temptation and victory walk hand in hand here below, why talk of an impossible divorce? There was one excuse, and but one, for Lady Adelaide's decision; and that, perhaps, of some real weight: she firmly believed in Sir Allen's attachment to herself; she believed that, in following the guidance of her own will, one human being's happiness would be at least secured; and in the thought there was something of unmixed self-forgetting satisfaction. Not only was it a blessed thing to be loved, and loved so truly,—for who could doubt the depth and sincerity of a heart which, unchilled, as others had been, by an indifference some had even ventured to call heartlessness, was still bent on laying its worship at her feet?—not only this, but was it not a good, a blessed thing to light the torch of a fellow-creature's happiness? She would not be a selfish wife, like too many who had affected to

marry for "love and that alone;" she had once dreamt of such affection in its holiest reality, but dreams passed away or faded into air as one grew older—who ever grasped them in their first loveliness? Life altogether was a vision—a beautiful and a pointless one, excepting to a few; and they were probably deceived in thinking it aught else. She had often tried to philosophize herself into some of its mysteries, but had never been satisfied, had never yet met—much and deeply as she had read and dived into the thoughts of others,—never yet met with its interpretation. She had not deceived Sir Allen; he had often told her that men who loved as he loved seldom expected to meet with a like return, and was constantly quoting, as a favourite maxim, De Rochefaucault's well-known words, that the "pleasure of love consists in loving, rather than in being the object of affection." She would repay her husband's devotion as far as it was possible,—enough for *his* happiness at all events, if not for her own; it was but a half motive, poor Lady Adelaide's; but it is better to excuse than to condemn: she was tempted, let no one say a little; for who can fathom the whirlpool of another's temptations? she fell weakly into snares artfully prepared for an unguided, and consequently misguided, footstep. Who may dare cast a stone at her, when close behind, watching those erring footsteps with sorrowing glance, followed the meek angel guardian, not in judgment, but in pity?

Sir Allen and his wife were to visit Italy immediately after their marriage, much to the latter's gratification, who, in consequence of her father's dislike to travelling, had never yet been on the Continent. Sir Allen's anxiety to see his little girl, about whom his betrothed made frequent and somewhat troublesome inquiries, led to this arrangement. On the fair bride-elect's, however, expressing an earnest wish for the child's return with them to England, an unseen

frown clouded Sir Allen's brow as he assured her this circumstance must depend entirely on the state of Lucia's health;—she was a delicate child, and the physicians had advised him to leave her in Italy for at least several years to come, otherwise he would gladly have had her with him in England, if only to enliven his lonely hearth, and cheer the depression of spirit at times almost unendurable, so heavily in past years had it weighed upon him. Lady Adelaide was full of pity and unexpressed astonishment. Sir Allen had always seemed to her gay-spirited beyond the rest of the world; she sought to cheer him by a smiling prophecy of Lucia's health improving sufficiently, under her matronly care and superintendence, to enable him to gratify his wish of bringing the dear child home. Her next question was, whether he intended the little girl to be brought up in the Catholic Church, or had he given the nuns directions to the contrary. She knew this was sometimes the case with Protestant parents, when leaving their children in Catholic schools; only, perhaps, as Lucia's, Adelaide was about to add, mother; but fortunately, ere the words passed her lips, stopped abruptly. The scornful laugh with which her very natural question was received sent a feeling of indescribable chilliness through the future Lady Mansfield's heart; but Sir Allen instantly recovering himself, accused her playfully of giving him a lesson in somebody's catechism, with broken answers, which he well remembered having been dinned into his ears when a boy. He really had never taken the matter of Lucia's future religious opinions into consideration: she was a mere baby when he left Italy; the difficulty, therefore, had never occurred to him. Now, however, his beautiful Adelaide had suggested the idea, he would think over the matter. Of course, the child must be taught the same religion as herself; there was abundance of time; she was too young to have become attached, or bigoted, to any

particular creed. A child of nine years of age might easily be frightened—he meant, laughed out, or perhaps enticed was a better word—off any foolish prejudices in which she might happen to have been educated. The words jarred painfully, she scarcely knew why, upon Lady Adelaide's ear, and the mocking laugh of the previous moment still rang there. Sir Allen seeing her look of distress and annoyance, though at a loss to comprehend the cause, abruptly changed the subject by opening a volume of Tennyson's last poems, a yesterday's present to his lady-love, and offering to read them aloud; and this being an accomplishment in which he excelled, the proposal was gladly accepted, and Lucia soon forgotten.

A host of morning visitors, who stayed luncheon, and talked incessantly for two hours,—a long ride in the afternoon, a dinner party in the evening, followed by dancing, lent their united efforts towards despatching Lady Adelaide to bed far too over-fatigued for meditation on the morning's conversation. The next day was also more full of engagements than usual, and the Thursday's morning post, with a letter from Lord St. Clair, bidding his family expect him late that evening, put Lucia and every one else out of Lady Adelaide's head, as very secondary individuals indeed, for many a long day afterwards.

Adelaide's affection for her brother was one of no ordinary character; with the confiding trustfulness of a little child had she been accustomed to look up to him, and fondly on the brother's side was the affection reciprocated. St. Clair had on his journey homewards heard of Adelaide's unlooked-for engagement, and had hastened onward with greater rapidity in consequence. Neither, on being introduced to Sir Allen Mansfield, was the young nobleman any longer surprised at his sister's somewhat hasty choice in the selection of a companion for life, though, at the first

announcement, the news had caused him no little brotherly anxiety. Sir Allen's cordiality of manner, and total absence of affectation, at once prepossessed St. Clair in his favour; and on finding from his father how entirely, and with what almost enthusiastic pleasure, the earl approved of the connection, all misgivings as to its wisdom disappeared from the young nobleman's mind. The supposition of his sister's being on the eve of allying herself to a man in whom her heart was little interested never entered his imagination, and she, with all her reverence and affection for St. Clair, was far too proud—far too much of a woman, in fact, to undeceive him. The troubles, annoyances, and lonely unhappiness of the last six months were not even alluded to. Why recall past disagreeables now it was too late to remedy them, or rather, now that her own hand had freed her from their tyranny, in a manner which, did St. Clair know the whole truth, would have made him very uselessly wretched? He had such exalted notions on these subjects, she would never run the risk of incurring his contempt; and the time for sympathy had passed away. Had he but returned a month or two sooner,—but that was nonsense now; besides, it was dishonourable both to herself and her family to regret even in thought the step now irrevocably taken; and though at times the sound of her brother's voice, or the glance of his eye, would send a thrill of affection through and faintly image to the eye of her soul the depths of tenderness therein contained, and with which she was so fatally trifling, the vision was quickly dismissed, sighed away into nothingness, rather than humiliate herself to the dust, ere yet too late, into a confession of her guilty insincerity, her pitiable weakness, and seek forgiveness from God and man by the penitence never rejected by the One, however scornfully, often revengefully, accepted by the other. Rather than incur this terrible disgrace, Lady Adelaide chose the far more terrible

alternative; she determined, spite of all things, to persevere in her loveless engagement. The earl had taken a house near Hyde Park for the season, from whence his daughter, according to her own wish, was to be married; for Adelaide could not endure the event to take place at Haseldyne, now the Templetons were no longer there. Some of her happiest days had been passed at their house;—when would such others be spent again? Besides, May and Rachel must be her chief bridesmaids, and it would be cruel to invite them to Haseldyne within a year of their father's death. It was finally arranged, therefore, for the whole family, nursery party included, to proceed to London the second week in June; thus allowing ample time for all wedding preparations. Lady Adelaide having expressed her intention of not being in a hurry to fix the day, she thought the beginning of August, or even the middle, quite early enough. Sir Allen suggested July, but was quickly overruled. His time for deciding Lady Adelaide's movements had not yet arrived. Patience and self-control for another month or two, and then farewell to aught but his own dear will! How he had borne with its daily contradiction so long, was a greater marvel even to himself than Sir Allen cared to acknowledge; but reward was at hand—the goal was in view—the road to it, though toilsome, was short; soon, very soon, would the dust collected on the journey be shaken from his feet, and its weariness forgotten. “The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.” Never were truer words uttered by the mouth of the Very Truth itself—there lies the goal (brief words), the journey—but where is the patience—where? Oh! where is the faith of the children of light?

CHAPTER IX.

"Love took up the Harp of Life,
Smote on all the chords with might ;
Smote the chord of self, that trembling,
Pass'd in music out of sight."—ALFRED TENNYSON.

"ARE you at leisure, my love?" inquired Mrs. Hope Forrester, a lady residing in Great Cumberland-street, Montague-square, entering her husband's study just as that gentleman, pen in hand, had settled down comfortably for the fourth time that morning in the hope of answering his letters, of—to him—of course, the utmost possible importance: we always think our own particular letters of more consequence than our neighbours'.

"On the contrary, my dear," replied Mr. Forrester, beginning to write; and then laying down the quill, with a look of intense worry as it spluttered the ink into his face and spoiled the sheet of paper before him. "On the contrary, my dear, I am excessively busy, and really cannot be interrupted by anybody; but I do wish you would have the goodness to see, or at least desire the servants to see, there are a few writable pens left in my room; it is so very annoying never finding one fit to write with."

"Try this," said Mrs. Forrester, drawing a silver-cased one from the well-furnished chatelaine at her side.

"Thank you—yes; this is something like a pen; I will do myself the honour of keeping it, with your leave; and now, my dear, if you would have the extreme kindness to allow me an hour or two's quiet, I should consider it an infinite obligation."

"Oh, I will not detain you a moment, Henry ; and as I and the girls are going immediately to the Royal Academy, then to pay visits, and not probably return before dinner-time, you will have the whole day to yourself ; but I am anxious beforehand to consult you about our little soirée next week, that is I——"

"What nonsense, my dear ; surely you and my daughters can arrange those sort of things between you ; and considering the number of times your knowledge of party-giving is called into requisition, I should think you ought to be well up in these matters."

"Yes ; of course. That is not exactly what I mean. I want to engage—that is, I want you, my love, if you will be kind enough, to inquire for me about the young lady who sang the other evening at Signor Spagnoletti's concert-rooms, and to try to form an engagement with her, if possible, for our weekly soirées ; she would be an immense acquisition. People are raving about her voice, and, I dare say, too, she would not mind playing a quadrille or two in the course of the evening. The girls like a little dancing, and this sort of thing is now more the rage than balls, and less expensive, too," added Mrs. Forrester, thinking the concluding argument would probably have more effect than any other in attaining her object. Mr. Forrester, however, for once, did not oppose any one of the numerous difficulties he was wont to allege when called upon to exert himself in aiding and abetting what he was pleased to call (whether truthfully or not we are unable to decide) his wife's extravagances. Not that he recognized for one moment the wondrous economy of engaging a first-rate songstress to entertain his guests, or entered into the still wilder idea of supposing she would trouble herself to play dancing music for their increased edification ; but he had listened to the voice Mrs. Forrester alluded to more than once, and

was well content to hear its strains again, whether in his own house or elsewhere. Mr. Forrester, therefore, to his fair lady's unutterable surprise, at once undertook her mission; the result of which unlooked-for amiability was a promise from Signor Spagnoletti to introduce the subject to the lady in question. He would, if Mrs. Hope Forrester thought advisable, inclose a note from herself to Miss Templeton. After a short consultation with Rachel, May decided upon closing with the offer therein contained. The sisters agreed upon the greatly diminished obstacles standing in the way of excuses for evening parties in comparison to the straits they already found themselves placed in from time to time by Mrs. Templeton's questions on the subject of those dreaded public concerts. May shrank more and more from attending these latter, and would thankfully have resigned them, if possible, for some less painful method of gaining her mother's bread. She constantly reproached herself for this cowardice, this stupidity, in not getting accustomed, "as other people did, to an inevitable necessity."

"It must be her sad want of humility," thought poor May; "she was so terribly proud. How often had she wished, in reading the lives of martyrs, to imitate their example, or, at least, to be endowed with something of the same spirit,—their love of suffering, their fondly embraced humiliations. What presumption! The spirit of martyrdom, indeed! She who could not painlessly endure the condescending applause of those who, in education and refinement, and not unfrequently even in birth, were but her equals—nay, by the rude stare and whispered remark too often purposely allowed to reach her ear, proved by far the greater number to be immeasurably her inferiors. Inferiors!—how dare she use that word—how dare one human being use it when weighing self in the scale with another? Who should even dare use it for friend or foe,

save the Arbiter, whose decision we so carelessly await. Often and often, on going and returning from these concerts, would May reason thus with herself, and after the oft-reiterated confession would retire to rest with the steadfast resolution not to be so wrong and silly again. They did not mean to be rude. A concert singer, like one of Madame Tussaud's wax-works, was made to be stared at, and criticised, and called "pretty girl," and "fine figure," and so on. True, the speakers might remember there was a woman's heart,—perhaps an aching and sensitive one, hidden beneath the waxen block and the masked manner; but then, in public, people either could not or would not recollect this. It must be borne with patiently. From other and more odious admiration, May was shielded by a constant and invisible protector. Father, brother, friend, and lover were alike absent from her side; but innocence supplied their place—innocence, accompanied in her case by unconsciousness of evil. "Blessed, indeed," has it been well said, "are the pure in heart!" Wrong and crime surround them in word and deed and unholy look;—they are not blind, but they are too dazzled to behold them; for the vision of beauty hereafter to absorb, and even now dawning on their spiritual existence, is the mirror on the surface of which they gaze down on the evil ways of their fellow-men, and either comprehend them not, or turn aside with a strange and sad surprise.

An early evening was fixed for May's first appearance at Mrs. Forrester's house. Having no escort, she was necessarily the first arrival, and had to wait alone in the spacious and well-appointed drawing-rooms for a full hour and a half before even Mrs. Forrester made her appearance, followed by her daughters—two tall, one medium height, and one decidedly *petite*, young ladies, all elegantly "got up" in white tarlatain, rosebuds, and heliotrope, and all very

polite (there being no one else, be it remembered, at present in the saloon) to Miss Templeton. She was overloaded with inquiries about her music, complimented by all fine ladies together on her divine singing, and surveyed from head to foot, from eyebrow to little finger, with the hasty but minute consideration we have most of us suffered tortures, one time or another of our lives, from elegant curiosity.

May found some little difficulty in replying to three or four questions in one breath, but was quickly relieved from this dilemma by finding her answers were neither waited for nor listened to on being given. And now a double knock, and then another—and another—and another—and another—and, behold, she was once more alone, though no longer, as before, in an empty room. Every one was talking, chattering, greeting one another around—everybody was charmed to meet everybody, and nobody considered it by any means a short time since they last met. Young men were busily employed in attempting to attract a nod of recognition from young ladies, who, perfectly aware of their immediate vicinity, preferred, or, at all events, chose to be thought to prefer, the conversation of the dowager lady on the adjoining seat to the exertion of turning their graceful heads for the expected bow. It came, however, in due time, all the more enhanced in value for the brief delay, which was now fully compensated for by the promise to dance a quadrille, in the course of the evening. May, on the entrance of the first party, had remained in her place, expecting, from an instinctive faith in the kind-heartedness of the world in general, and especially in those of its inhabitants who had been a moment before addressing her with such interest and warmth of manner, an introduction sooner or later to some one or other of the numerous visitors, young or old, lady or gentleman, she cared little

which; they were all alike to her, and she to them—strangers in the past, present, and future; but some one to speak to, if only to avoid the awkwardness of sitting alone and isolated where all around were friends: this was a boon she did expect, simply from having been accustomed, in her childhood's vanished home of comfort and luxury, ever to *do* to all men indiscriminately what in their place she would have craved for herself. It was all May's fault for having grown up with such old-fashioned notions. Had it been otherwise, she would have suffered less disappointment upon finding that, as the guests began to pour into Mrs. Hope Forrester's room, she was not only alone, but becoming, from some cause or other, principally, no doubt, on account of that very loneliness, an object of notice, and that, as usual, of no enviable character to a woman like herself, at once proud, and yet, as often happens, equally free from vanity and love of personal admiration. Poor May, it must be confessed, began to chafe sadly under this no slight mortification, and the oft-formed resolutions of not being so wrong or silly again seemed on the point of vanishing, as the very best resolves are apt to do, into very thin air indeed, when one of the Miss Forresters abruptly approached, and with the intolerable manners, we are aware, some "high-bred and aristocratic" young ladies can assume at will, desired rather than requested Miss Templeton to take her seat at the piano and give them a little music. Music! the word was quite enough for May. Miss Forrester's tone and manner were unobserved. That one word brought gushing back on her tempted spirit and wavering memory all that needed recalling there. Vividly arose the remembrance of who and where and what she was, in the midst of that gay, slighting, neglectful company. A hired singer!—in a London ball-room—earning her mother's bread—in obedience to—

ay, and in imitation also of—— Whom?—A Nazarine carpenter—the only son of a virgin mother!

The feeling of degradation subsided. The demon Pride fled, scared and defeated, from her heart as, with a smile, she arose—crossed the crowded room unescorted, and with childlike grace took her seat at the instrument, pressing softly to her bosom an image ever hanging concealed there. May was no longer alone—no longer forgotten! She spoke and was replied to, in accents softer and yet more distinct than any near her. She listened, and was listened to by an untiring ear; she “loved, and was beloved again!” The loneliness—the cold neglect—the impertinent curiosity—were all forgotten, ere the first notes of her voice sent a hush through the apartment, and every eye was turned towards the piano, while the conversation subsided into a lull of whispered inquiry of “Who is she?—professional!—you don’t say so! I should never have thought it! What an uncommon-looking face!”

Song succeeded song, and all were in raptures, or at least professed to be. The genuine lovers of music were really charmed, and the rest thought Miss Templeton’s style of singing a decided improvement upon the attempts they were often condemned to listen to at the half-ball half-concert assemblies now in fashion among their set. “Mrs. Forrester had done the right thing,” was universally decided. “It was far better to have hired people at once, and not tax a certain number of one’s musical friends to entertain, or bore—whichever the case might turn out—the remainder of the party. The master (speaking complementarily) of the house was mistaken in thinking there would be any difficulty as to the quadrille business—Miss Templeton was ready to play all the evening, only too thankful to be thus employed, the greater sacrifice being to sit still in patient and inactive submission, to be stared at

and commented upon by Mrs. Forrester's guests. Well for May this was the case, the young ladies and their partners being so dancingly inspired by her music, that it appeared probable her task would be no sinecure that evening.

"Do you know who that beautiful girl is, Maitland—the one who is playing this capital waltz?" inquired a young man, vainly endeavouring to edge his way within the doorway in hopes of obtaining a better view of the lady in question.

The gentleman thus interrogated raised his eye-glass and looked languidly across the room;—"Don't know," really, Egerton," he drawled out, after a moment's reconnoitre; "but where have *you* sprung from all on a sudden? Why, I thought you were at Oxford, man; how oppressively hot it is this evening."

"Oh, I came up by the eight o'clock train, to be sure, and have but this moment finished dinner. But, oh, look, she is going to sing; I wish you could make room for me on that seat, I am nearly crushed into a mummy out here."

"You ask for a physical impossibility, my good friend, I have scarcely space enough for existence as it is. But what, in the name of all the fair ladies in the universe, young, old, married, and single, are you in such a fuss about now, Egerton? Who is going to sing? I should have thought we had had enough siren-strains for one mid-summer evening. It is too warm for enjoyment of any kind, and I have serious thoughts of departing at once, were it not for these tiresome engagements, of martyrizing oneself by dancing quadrilles," sighed the Honourable Augustus Maitland, preparing himself for the coming martyrdom by the most elegant of yawns, at the same time dangling to and fro, in a would-be care-for-nothing manner, a mother-of-pearl memorandum-case—we forget the technical phrase for it—on which were inscribed the favoured

names of his carefully-selected partners for the future dances.

"Oh," said Egerton impatiently, paying no attention whatever to the latter part of Mr. Maitland's speech, "of course, I mean the young lady I just alluded to. Who can she be? Did you ever, in your life, see such a face before?" The eye-glass was once more elevated with a more scrutinizing glance than before.

"Hum—ah! upon my word, I see no occasion for such rhapsodies. She has fine eyes and hair, perhaps—but, for my own part, I prefer a less marble-like beauty; she would look well enough on a pedestal in one's hall, or in the sculpture-room at the exhibition. But, for the rest, I should say a marble face like that was generally an index to a marble heart—a detestable thing in a woman."

"Do you really think so?" replied Mr. Egerton, carelessly, in a slightly sarcastic, almost contemptuous, tone; "you are a great authority in these matters. But there is Mrs. Forrester; I must go and pay my *devoirs*, or I shall get into disgrace;" and leaving the Honourable Augustus to his own meditations on marble faces and marble hearts, Mr. Egerton made his way, with no small difficulty, through undulating waves of white and coloured muslin, witnessing the melancholy shipwreck of one or two flounces on his voyage towards the tastefully-decorated chandelier, under whose golden and very becoming light stood Mrs. Hope Forrester, with six or seven of the said flounces, still in good trim and spread for sail, trying to make herself simultaneously fascinating to two elderly ladies, one in amber, the other in cherry-coloured silk, white lace over-skirts, youthful head-dresses, short sleeves and uncovered necks—both talking very fast, and making violent efforts not to appear unbecomingly warm, by dint of fanning themselves so vociferously, that Mr. Egerton, feeling certain an attack of bronchitis or

rheumatic fever would inevitably ensue, considered it a duty he owed himself and family carefully to avoid the infection by steering round Mrs. Hope Forrester, on the opposite side—a precaution that lady's youngest daughter, who had been watching his movements with some little anxiety, gave the gentleman no small credit for—fearing lest, had he ventured by another path, the owners of the juvenile head-dresses might have monopolized the handsome and *very* agreeable Mr. Egerton's society for the next half-hour.

"Good evening, Mrs. Forrester; I have been having a regular tiger-hunt after you," exclaimed Mr. Egerton, shaking his hostess's white-gloved hand, on reaching her, as if, instead of the delicately-apparelled Mrs. Hope Forrester's, it had belonged to one of the college chums to whom he had just bid adieu. "What a lot of people you have here to-night; I can't imagine where they all come from. They are all new to me,—I don't see one of the old set among them."

"Never mind, never mind," replied the lady, shaking her fan rebukingly at him. "Old or new, you are equally welcome to them, if you can behave like a Christian, and not, after your old fashion, tell everybody precisely what comes uppermost in that unwisely matter-of-fact head of yours; and now, I suppose, as a fresh quadrille is forming, you would like an introduction to some pretty girl?"

"Thanks — you have just hit the right nail; I am dying for an introduction to the young lady who played the last waltz."

"Oh, you have made one of your boyish mistakes, as usual," replied Mrs. Forrester, smiling; "she is merely a professional singer, and came here simply in that capacity. Rather too lady-like, I grant you, for her position, poor thing, but, of course, cannot dance, or anything of that kind. I will introduce you to Miss Rose Summers, a pretty

little thing, but rather shy ; worth making up to, though," whispered Mrs. Forrester, who had reasons of her own for not wishing Mr. Egerton to dance much with her own daughters, "and you are quite capable of talking for two, if I am not greatly mistaken;—here, this way. Miss Summers—Mr. Egerton," and before he had time to recover from his disappointment, the young man and his baby-faced partner were standing *vis-à-vis* to Mr. Maitland and the youthful Countess of Athol, the belle of the season, and one of its acknowledged flirts, though only married the previous year.

"What a shame!" mentally ejaculated Mr. Egerton. "I am not going to stand this sort of thing;—worth making up to, indeed. I wish women would not spoil themselves talking in that odious way. Ah, what a pretty air, and good time, though. *She* is playing again—poor girl, how tired she must be. 'Can't dance and can't be spoken to;'—why not, I wonder? She looks as much a lady as any of the rest. I'll speak to her before the evening is over, or my name is not Frank Egerton."

The said gentleman was too well bred, however, in spite of his vexation, as well as too kind-hearted, not to exert himself for the amusement of his little partner, a timid girl, just out of the school-room, whom, after the quadrille, he chaperoned into the refreshment-saloon, cogitating within himself meanwhile how far more Miss Rose would probably enjoy a game of blindman's buff, if she were allowed the freedom of choice, to all this formality. As to himself, a go at cricket was not to be compared in the same breath; but oh, thank the Fates, there comes Augusta Cunningham, as a fresh arrival was announced, and little Miss Summers was politely but very quickly reseated by the side of her mamma.

"That is first-rate; she has always plenty to say for herself, and is so friendly, when she chooses, into the bargain.

Ah, she is nodding; I see by her face we shall be good friends to-night, and the present is all one need care about. How late you are, Miss Cunningham!" as he gained her side; "always the last in the room, as usual; but I suppose you have been hard at work already this evening."

"I should think I had, indeed, Mr. Frank Egerton. I only wish you and the rest of your idle set at Oxford worked one quarter as hard as we flounced-muslin young ladies do, merely to pass our lives away in peace."

"Well, but I suppose you do it to please yourselves. There's no earthly occasion for your hard work unless you like—is there?" he inquired, archly.

"Oh, isn't there, forsooth? Much you know about it, I should imagine," rejoined Miss Cunningham. I can only tell you, Mr. Frank, or Mr. Francis, Egerton, whichever you call yourself, I am thoroughly sick of it, — so sick of it, that, were it possible, I would turn hermit to-morrow; not with the intention of fasting or chanting my office all day long, — pray don't misunderstand me, — but simply for the sake of being let alone, and not continually pestered by a set of tiresome men and tiresome women, whom I either don't care about the length of my little finger, or positively dislike."

"You are highly complimentary to present company, at all events," said Mr. Egerton, excessively entertained.

"Complimentary — not I; you must fish in other water if you want compliments, and when you have succeeded in hooking all that are worth catching to land, I wish you joy for your pains."

"Well, suppose we settle the matter by a mutual agreement to be as rude to each other as possible whenever we have the misfortune to meet, and seal our contract over the next quadrille?" asked the gentleman.

"Don't flatter yourself on that point either, Sir Frank

Egerton, of the persuasive tongue. I am not going to run the risk of endangering my valuable health by skipping about the room, frog-fashion, in such an atmosphere as this. If you want the pleasure of my society and edifying conversation, you must seek it neither under chandelier or greenwood-tree, but on the landing outside the door, where I perceive all the sensible ones among you are collecting. There now, don't follow me about like a King Charles's lapdog. You can go that way and I this, and if we happen to meet at the end, all well and good; and if we don't, all good and well. What a blessing it is to have a second cousin three times removed to say what one likes to, and to keep in order," said Miss Cunningham, making her way towards the door,—an accomplishment, thanks to a sudden movement in the crowd, more easily managed than at first sight appeared possible; and having reached their trysting-place, Mr. Egerton and his original lady-cousin were soon chatting merrily again, and with as much privacy, for aught man, woman, or child overheard of their conversation in the surrounding din, as though in good earnest beneath the quiet shadow of the greenwood-tree Augusta had alluded to.

"By the way," said Mr. Egerton, at the first eligible pause, but quite *inàpropos* of anything that had yet been said, "do you know the name of the young lady who has been playing and singing here this evening? Mrs. Forrester says she is professional, and looked horrors at my venturing to ask, in my simplicity, for an introduction to a girl who looks, in my opinion, more like one of Raphael's pictures of the Madonna steeped out of an old picture-frame than anything else I ever had the good fortune to set eyes on; and as to her voice, I only wish you could hear it—an angel's can scarcely be more musical."

"Why," exclaimed Miss Cunningham, "this is an exact

portrait of my friend Miss Templeton ; you could scarcely have drawn a more graphic one,—yet how she, of all people in the world, should be visible at one of the magnificent Mrs. Hope Forrester's *soirées* passes my comprehension ; except, indeed, as—did I not hear you say something about professional just now ? ”

“ Yes ; I told you Mrs. Forrester refused to introduce me to this young lady, — for lady, whether professional or not, she evidently is,—for that sole reason ;—don't you call it absurd—worse than absurd ? ”

“ I call it horrid,” returned his companion, trying on tip-toe to peep over a multitude of small artificial flower-gardens, several not over tastefully laid out, and the majority decidedly over-crowded, and then adding abruptly, “ Oh, there she is — May, her very self — poked up by the piano, and looking like what's her name, the goddess of music, wrapt up in her own peculiar world of melody, and far too much absorbed therein to notice the bad behaviour of the one she is this evening residing in. Not a creature speaking to her — just like their impudence. I will cross over the moment this waltzing is finished, and introduce you, Mr. Frank, to a girl you don't meet every day in the week, especially in London.”

“ Thank you more than I can express,” exclaimed Mr. Egerton, with increased interest ; “ but tell me, if it is not asking too much, how did you come to know her ?—how is she obliged to work in this way for her living, in a way her face tells one at a glance is not much in harmony with her feeling ? ”

“ Listen attentively, if you want to make good use of the answer to your question, and I will tell you as pretty, and a far more edifying though matter-of-fact tale than many of your three-volume novels can manage to get up,” replied Miss Cunningham ; and she related with sparkling vivacity

as much of May Templeton's history as had come to her knowledge, embellishing the reality with her own peculiar annotations and reflections. The young man's eye glistened as she proceeded, and he listened with rapt attention.

"Capital—first-rate—something like a woman," he exclaimed, when the tale was concluded; "but see the waltz is over—we might get across now by a little fashionable pushing."

Augusta, quite as eager as himself, thought so too, and taking his proffered arm, they were, ere another three minutes had elapsed, by Miss Templeton's side, and soon engaged in conversation. Mr. Egerton's frank, almost boyish, simplicity of manner pleased May, and by reminding her of Arthur, dismissed her usual reserve; a less agreeable person than himself would have been welcome at that moment; it being a positive relief to speak to any one who greeted her as an equal, and appeared to think it possible the professional young lady at the piano had thoughts, ideas, and feelings in common with others. As to Augusta Cunningham, she was in raptures. Never was meeting more opportune or friend more welcome. She would have come two hours before had she but known of May's whereabouts; and Augusta was sincere. Sincerity was her god,—she paid homage at no other shrine. May knew this, and turned her knowledge into a prayer. It was a great—a noble gift, that love for truth, spite of the earthly imperfections, the self-willed arrogance, in which for the present Miss Cunningham's was ever clouded.

Oh, that, in the end, truth-worship might serve as a guide to lead her to its source; for having once beheld—once touched the brink of that fountain, hers was not the nature to be frightened backward, as too many are, by the voice of the noisy multitude, declaiming it to be falsehood. The cry would not content Augusta; she would turn and demand

its *proof*. The uproar of a crowd, whether a religious or secular one—and they are about equally vociferous,—would never terrify one whose idol was not based on the tottering foundation of human opinion; and when, instead of proof, they did but reiterate their maddened accusation, she would depart with indifference and renew her search.

“May I ask the name of your last song, Miss Templeton?” inquired her new acquaintance, anxious to lead the conversation to the subject on which of all others he felt she must be most eloquent.

May blushed—she would, if possible, have avoided answering the question.

“I’ll be bound to say it is one of her own composing,” cried Miss Cunningham, seeing her hesitation, “and has no name at all. If you wish to hear it again, you must come to our house the day after to-morrow, and I will persuade Miss Templeton to sing it. These people would not appreciate the same thing a second time in one evening; they prefer novelty,—but who is this good lady making her way towards us? Ah, Mrs. Forrester herself, bent, no doubt, on the merciful errand of requesting you to play another quadrille, Miss Templeton; but please to recollect that I have engaged my own fair self to Messrs. Broadwood and Co. for the next half-hour at least, and do not intend to let any human being interfere with my musical flirtation,—so be advised in time, and don’t attempt it.”

“Ah, my dear Miss Cunningham, how charmed I am to find you here, I have just promised your hand to Mr. De Lacy for this quadrille. Miss Templeton, will you oblige us?—a more lively set than the last, if you please; they were a shade too *triste*, and played rather too slowly for our crowded rooms.”

May arose to comply, but was forced down again, with somewhat rough good-nature, by her friend.

"I have engaged myself to play *this* quadrille, Mrs. Forrester," said Augusta, addressing that lady in a tone at once obliging and decisive,—“I should be glad if my friend Miss Templeton would dance—her fingers must be aching, I am afraid, already—at least, mine would long ago, had I been in her place.”

A cloud came over Mrs. Forrester's heated brow; *she* either did not catch, or did not understand, the word *friend*, used by Augusta in speaking of Miss Templeton, or else otherwise only laid it to the charge of the former young lady's well-known eccentricities.

"On no account, my dear Miss Cunningham," she replied persuasively. "I am extremely obliged by your kind consideration, but could not think for one moment of allowing you to play. Besides, I assure you I have made myself responsible for your hand to Mr. De Lacy—you will not be cruel enough to disappoint him, and get me into a scrape at the same time, will you?" and Mrs. Hope smiled winningly, and shook her fan—mute reproach, supposed to be wafted from every feather thereof—at Miss Cunningham.

"I am sorry, nevertheless, to be under the sad, disagreeable necessity," returned Augusta, by no means deterred from the purpose, "but I have made up my mind, with the most whimsical determination, to play this quadrille; and as I consider an engagement to my own will far more binding than any other, I must ask you to console the unfortunate Mr. De Lacy with a less agreeable and good-looking partner than Miss Augusta Cunningham."

Mrs. Forrester, well aware that, notwithstanding the careless good humour of her tone, Miss Cunningham's will brooked no interference, withdrew from the piano, evidently not a little annoyed, in spite of the well-ordered smile under which her chagrin thought best to conceal itself. The poor lady, however, consoled her fretted nerves a few hours later

by apostrophizing the dear Miss Cunningham, whom she had been so charmed to see, as the very most odious girl of her acquaintance.

"I do not intend or wish to dance, Augusta," said May, again attempting to rise as Mrs. Forrester departed; "thank you a thousand times for wishing to take my place, I quite understand it all, but, indeed, it cannot be. And I assure you, playing these quadrilles is not the smallest self-denial—I much prefer it to dancing."

"Very likely, May; but, unfortunately, my preference coincides with your own, and self-sacrifice not being one of *my* virtues, as Mr. Egerton will bear me out in asserting, I do not intend to yield the point—play the quadrille I'm determined. If you're such a goose as to refuse to dance with my poor young cousin, who, upon the whole, is not so bad a partner as his face would lead you to imagine, I cannot help it. You can follow *your* inclination, and I *mine*—by far the most peaceful way of arranging matters in this world, if folks would but believe it." And with these words, Miss Cunningham placed herself at the piano, and in a style no one could bring the accusation against of being considered *triste*, began a set of Irish quadrilles, well known, from memory.

Mr. Egerton feeling instinctively that May's determination not to dance was a sincere one, forbore to press her, greatly as he would have enjoyed the triumph (setting aside the gratification) of dancing with the most beautiful girl in the room, even had she not been, as Augusta had informed him, good enough society for any one there, as far as birth and education went—and a great deal *too* good, if heart-superiority were the fashion of the day. He, nevertheless, retained his seat by her side, and continued the conversation Mrs. Hope Forrester's appearance had interrupted. They were talking earnestly on

some subject of mutual interest, when suddenly May's cheek became paler than usual, and then flushed into deepest crimson, as some hidden spring of emotion drove the warm blood back from the trembling heart within, and left it all but benumbed with happiness—that unexpected happiness, always so doubly exciting.

Mr. Egerton did not observe her change of countenance; he was too intent on answering her last remark, but the reply fell unheeded on her ear. She was watching with intense interest the movements of a gentleman who had that moment entered the ball-room, one whose image floated in the horizon of her holiest and most sacred recollections—her earliest and thrice-blessed memory—ay, and one upon whose heart her name was engraven with the ineffaceable impression of an utterly unworldly affection.

The dance is at an end, and Augusta, escorted by Mr. Egerton, has departed in search of refreshments, inviting May to accompany them, and promising, on her refusal, to return in due time with wine and ices, one or the other of which they mean to insist on her consuming. He does not see May for some few minutes—that distant gentleman—and then astonishment and pleasure hold him rooted to the ground—only for a second, however! He approaches May, while pressed more closely than ever to her heart is her crucifix. He whose voice had soothed her loneliness must calm her gladness. Happiness without His smile would be but dreary excitement.

"May!" said Lord St. Clair;—oh, the volume of meaning contained in that little word. "May! this is charming—more than charming, how came you here, and where have you been hiding yourself since I came home? I began to despair of ever meeting you again. Rachel and myself have spent hours together in Hamilton Street, awaiting your arrival. Yes, and, oddly enough, I always came at the

moment you had departed. It was strange we did not meet on the steps, or at least in the street, only Fate ordained it otherwise. Well, I must forgive the capricious lady, I suppose, now, in consideration of her having at length condescended to usher me into your presence, according to her time-honoured custom, when the happy event was least expected. If you had heard me railing against her vagaries for the last fortnight, you would say I did not deserve my good fortune now."

"Well, it is an ill wind, indeed, that blows no one good," returned May, smiling brightly, "and Rachel has been all the gainer by my absence; she has improved wonderfully already from the drawing-lessons you have been so kindly bestowing on her the last week or two."

"I am so glad you think her improved, and you know we were obliged to find some employment to amuse ourselves, and while away the time we should otherwise have been compelled to waste on your account, Miss May; and dear Rachel is so quick, it is quite a pleasure to be her drawing-master, though her humility makes it hard for me to persuade her of the fact. We propose making an attempt at water-colours next week, and intend you to be *chaperon*. How beautiful our little Rachel has grown."

"Our little Rachel," how well the words sounded.

"Yes, has she not?" was the sister's glad, proud answer, "and yet as unconscious and childlike as ever. How I should love to have her likeness taken for the next exhibition, if I could—could——"

"If you could afford it, you mean. Never mind that, May; I will immortalize her myself, and charge you nothing for the trouble, if you are a good girl. It is a capital thought—don't stare in that impertinent manner, May, at my presumption; you little imagine the first-rate artist I have become during my foreign tour. I venture to say you will

be so entranced with Rachel's portrait, that the difficulties I expect to meet with in persuading you also 'to sit for me,' as we artistic gentlemen call it, will be considerably lessened."

"Hope is not always prophecy," returned his listener, looking up archly, "and I feel anything but inclined to fulfil yours; having my picture taken by a first-rate artist is an honour as far beyond my deserts as my wishes—nothing short of a positive command from mamma should make me undergo the penance."

"Very well," said Lord St. Clair, assuming a severely determined expression; "you have at once challenged and infuriated me, and must suffer in consequence. The command from head-quarters shall be obtained the next time I see Mrs. Templeton, and your rack prepared the day following in the shape of a well-stretched piece of canvas arranged with malicious care over my easel. But now to be serious, May, I am really anxious to know how you came to be here this evening; I did not know you had entered already on fashionable life," and Lord St. Clair smiled as he thought how well she graced it. May coloured and bit her lip. What was the right step now? Should she unfold the truth, and give him pain, or evade the question by insincere prevarication? Certainly not the *latter*. Falsehood, however slight a one, must not be suffered to sneak in between them under the cloak of affection. "Why do you hesitate, May?" said Lord St. Clair, half playfully and half in surprise. "Have I made unintentionally an impertinent inquiry?"

"Not in the least, St. Clair; you might fairly wonder at my being here, and yet I would rather not reply to it," she replied, blushing. "Can you trust me, in spite of this caprice, as I am afraid it must appear to you?"

"Trust you, May," said the young man, gazing tenderly down into the soft dark eyes, now almost sadly upraised to

his own. "Whom else should I trust, if I doubted *you*? Do not tell me, if you would rather not; it is some pretty little secret, I'll venture to say, and, like a great many other pretty little secrets, scored up on your account in my log-book of memorandums at Haseldyne, will have to pop out some of these days, May, when——" his voice became lower, softer, more gently modulated, and other words were on his lips—words written for many a long day past on the brave, yet timid, heart within—timid alone in its earnest quivering love for her—love never yet courageous enough to frame itself into language. Words enough flew to his lips now, and with importunate supplication sought permission to pass that narrow, solemn boundary, on which so much of weal or woe, of joy or sorrow, of life's misery or happiness, its heaviest disappointment or bitterest dismay, and of deeper things than these, hell's dark despair, or heaven's unfading sunshine, hangs as in a balance, above whose scale there is suspended the fiat of man's will alone to turn it.

The words on Lord St. Clair's lips—and though all-important ones, they were few in number—would fain have passed that boundary now, excited by the sudden apparition of one he had believed far distant beside her quiet hearth at home—one he had parted from a few months previously in the silence of a speechless sorrow, too sacred a one to be then broken in upon by a declaration of even the holiest earthly love, and recalled by her presence to the remembrance of all they had been and ever must be to each other. St. Clair's self-control had to undergo a severe struggle, ere it succeeded in imposing the restraint he felt at that moment almost powerless to enforce, until the influence of another voice from within, in more alluring tones than that of prudence, commended silence. The yearning words, however few—however unobserved by those around, absorbed as each might be in the individual interests of the

evening,—must surely not find utterance there. In the name of all those words' most sacred significance, let them remain awhile, if only till to-morrow, unspoken. Not in the withering air of a London ball-room, even though deserted by its thoughtless, pleasure-hunting guests; it surely were not holy enough for its purpose. Thus spoke the heart-prompter, and to him obedience was yielded. No, not there should those words be uttered—not there should they seek even a look's response. Far away from that noisy company—far away from its nothingness and forgetfulness of aught beyond the moment's gaiety—far away beneath the bright sunshine, not fairer to him than her smile, beside the flowers, less pure in their loveliness than her spirit—on some bright day, when heart was freest and earth most gladsome, and where no ear save One could hearken, an ear already acquainted with the tale, would he speak of his long-cherished love, and ask for hers in return—ask her to walk beside him through their brief earthly pilgrimage toward the land where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but where they whose love in this world had begun, continued, and ended in God, would doubtless be once more united. But then came the question, was he certain of May's love? would she hear his suit?—was he sure of her answer being in his favour?

"Yes!" was St. Clair's proud, glad answer—proud for *her* sake—proud because she knew not, dreamt not, of guile. His May was Truth itself. They had loved each other from earliest childhood with more than ordinary friendship. Their hearts had long been entwined, linked in one. What if the formal words of betrothal had never yet been actually pronounced—no matter. Little need to speak in set terms of what each knew so well. She was far too good, too saint-like, to *act* an untruth, which it would be, were May ever to refuse to—to——

Pshaw! what an idea!—she who from her very baby-

hood had been his own little angel guardian—she who could not bear to pain a worm. Lord St. Clair had been a passionate, difficult boy to manage, and the earl, who had not the most remote idea of guiding the disposition or checking the faults of his children, had often in despair sent his troublesome first-born to Mr. Templeton's house, requesting that gentleman, as a personal favour, to reprove and punish him; and St. Clair well remembered how, time after time, when condemned, for some boyish misdemeanour, to spend the long bright summer afternoon in the Templetons' school-room construing Latin grammar (a considerably more severe task, as the inflicter of the punishment was well aware, than a good flogging)—how the door would slowly open, and a tiny creature, in white muslin frock and blue sash, walk gravely up to him, her long fringed eyelashes wet with tears; how she would climb on his knee, and throwing her small white arms round his neck, would whisper, "St. Clair must be good boy, or May won't love him; she won't be his little wife. Shall May ask God to make St. Clair good again?" and he recollected, too, with a tear in his eye he was far from ashamed of now, how he, the tall schoolboy, too proud and self-willed to own his fault to another, had often knelt down by the little child while she repeated in soft lisping accents the Lord's Prayer and the Hail, Mary! and then would run off and return with sugar-plums saved from some nursery *fête*-day, or flowers from her own little garden, to beguile his solitude.

And had not the memory of that fair child been his safeguard through the temptations of a public school and college life—had he not many a time been held back from wrong and sin by the remembrance of her innocence and her purity, and by the desire, boy as he was, to be worthy that child's dear love? She wrote such frequent and such pretty notes to him at school—few schoolboys' letters were so care-

fully read, so treasured up. Lord St. Clair was, even from an early age, no mean artist, and his portfolio—his private one at least—was principally filled with sketches of May; either little May, or grown-up May; but all of undeniably lovely May. There was one full-sized portrait of her, exquisitely painted in water-colours, sketched on the day of her first communion. She was standing in her white dress and veil, with a few lilies of the valley in her hand he had given her on going into church. This picture was richly framed and hung in his bed-room; beneath it were inscribed, in illuminated characters, the following lines selected from Longfellow's touching poem entitled "Maidenhood:"—

"Bear a lily in thy hand—
Gates of brass cannot withstand
One touch of that magic wand,
Bear through sorrow, wrong, and ruth,
In thy heart the dew of youth—
On thy lips the smile of truth;—
And that smile like sunshine dart
Into many a sunless heart,
For a smile of God thou art."

"A smile of God!" Yes; May was, indeed, "a smile of God" to him, and he blessed that God for its pure sunshine. Few men were less troubled with vanity than Lord St. Clair. Implicit trust, unquestioning confidence in May's truth and sincerity, were the simple grounds of his security in her affection—self-love had no voice in the matter; on the contrary, with the humility always more or less an ingredient in great and noble natures, he considered himself altogether unworthy of her. But to return to the ball-room. The young nobleman's conversation with Miss Templeton had not passed either unnoticed or undeprecated by one person in the room, however much the claims of supper and champagne might, during the last quarter of an

hour, have served to shield him from more general observation.

"Do pray look at Lord St. Clair," whispered the eldest Miss Forrester to her mother, after regarding him and May for some moments with a look of more sarcastic amusement than would have been pleasant for either party to encounter; "do look at him talking to the very last person in the world, common sense, if not good taste, would suggest to him to notice. I wonder no one tries to cure him of this sort of nonsensical affectation. It was graceful enough in a boy, but completely spoils him now. He will become quite a laughing-stock some of these days, if he does not let the world take more care of him."

"I am afraid Miss Templeton is rather too attractive for her position," replied Mrs. Forrester. "It is provoking enough, for her voice and playing are both immense acquisitions, and she has really been more good-natured than those people generally condescend to be. I sadly want another quadrille, but could not positively run the risk of encountering a St. Clair frown by asking his *protégée*, as Miss Templeton evidently is, to play again. She would sing though, and I am in hopes the carriages will be shortly announced. It must be getting late—people are so inconsiderate not to leave earlier this stifling weather. I feel completely worn-out, and you girls look tired to death. Ah, Mrs. St. Aubyne, going already," as a lady leaning on her husband's arm approached to wish Mrs. Forrester good-night; "pray do not run away so soon, we are just going to have another song!—why, the evening is but half over,—pray stop for this—at least—if you must go afterwards. You are always such early people, I know, so I must not complain."

Lord St. Clair was by no means surprised at hearing May requested to sing "once more;" little dreaming the

four hours' hard labour that "once more" was a *finale* to, he sat behind and drank in the words of her song, fancying the "tear" in her voice, said to add so much to its beauty, more visible than ever this evening, till at last the fancy cast a shadow over his happiness in listening, though he knew not the cause of that melodious tear.

"Can you tell me," eagerly inquired May at the conclusion of her song, "who that lady is, dressed in black lace with violets in her hair? I have been watching her all this evening. How graceful she is; and her face, I have fallen deeply in love with it already;—see, she is going—that is her husband, I suppose;—watch her smile as she wishes Mrs. Forrester good-night. I wish——"

"What do you wish, May?" said St. Clair, amused by her enthusiasm. "Why, I never saw you in this wild state of mind about a mere stranger before. She is certainly a very pleasing-looking person, though twice your age, I should guess; and, moreover, not a person to form sudden friendships, if one may judge from her eye, and the fixed expression of her mouth; so, perhaps, on the whole, it is as well you are unacquainted. A one-sided friendship must be an unfortunate affair, almost as bad as an unrequited love; but I will ask her name;" and he leant forward to a lady opposite, and made the inquiry.

May caught the answer and smiled; it coincided with her preconceived ideas on the subject—the lady leaving the room?—her name? Oh! the Honourable Mrs. St. Aubyne; very quiet person, good family, but dowdy and unsociable; people say proud, that is, in her own way; makes up for it to her conscience by crotchety notions about the poor, and so on. No humility in that; quite the rage now, poking into workhouses, and catching small-pox and fever for the benefit of one's husband and children at home; don't admire it myself—but odd world, very odd.

"You agree in that remark, May?" said Lord St. Clair, as he met her amused look.

"Perfectly."

"And what is the result of your acquired knowledge as regards Mrs. St. Aubyne?"

"What do you think, St. Clair?"

"Why, that, with your usual obstinacy, you wish more than ever to be acquainted with the lady and her crotchets; am I not right, May?"

At this moment they were joined by Miss Cunningham and her cousin, Mr. Egerton, who, much to their disgust, had been detained in the refreshment-room by the difficulty of finding egress again, having once fairly entered within its precincts. They exchanged warm greetings with St. Clair, an old friend of the Cunningham family, and an intimate acquaintance of Mr. Egerton's. Augusta was delighted to find him still an inhabitant of this lower world; she had, she said, begun to reckon him among the treasures of the past, and had often been tempted to weep over his untimely end beneath the zone of some cruel eastern sky, or deep down under the waters of the dark-blue sea; had even gone so far as to sit down one morning with the intention of perpetrating a poem on the young Laird of Haseldyne, and his unknown death. Shortly after this, Miss Cunningham's carriage was announced, and in answer to a whispered invitation from Augusta, a seat therein was thankfully accepted by May, the disagreeable necessity of accounting, or rather of not accounting, to Lord St. Clair for her usual lonely cab drive home being thus avoided.

"You are quite an enigma to me, May," said Lord St. Clair, on bidding her good-night. "Rachel told me, with the gravest face in the world, you had all been leading such a very quiet life since we parted, and yet my first glimpse

of you is in a crowded ball-room, and very thick with one of the gayest young ladies of the season, and most unlike yourself. Ah! you are wondrously clever, May; but I will find it all out sooner or later. Remember the drawing-lesson; I am coming to call again on Thursday, and expect to find you and Rachel both ready, and on your best behaviour; you won't disappoint me this time—will you?" he added in a lower tone. She did not reply; but there is a silence more conclusive than words; so at least thought St. Clair, as he turned away happy and satisfied.

"You have cruelly disappointed me to-night, Miss Templeton," was Mr. Egerton's farewell, as he escorted Augusta to her carriage; "but may I venture to engage you for the first quadrille at Mrs. Cunningham's party on the 21st?"

"Oh no," said May, laughing; "I never make promises, or form engagements, I might not be able to fulfil, and it is more than probable I shall not be at Mrs. Cunningham's on the 21st; and quite as likely that, if there, you may find me no more in a dancing mood than to-night. You see the whole question to be one of ifs—suppose we leave it an open one."

"Never mind her, Frank," cried his cousin, kissing her hand to him, and waving a last adieu.

"The ifs will all turn in your favour this time; trust to my presentiment, seldom a delusive one."

Lord St. Clair walked home with Mr. Egerton that evening, and listened with untiring attention to the latter's enthusiastic eulogiums on Miss Templeton's beauty and her exquisite voice. They were but glittering baubles, to be sure, gifts for whose possession their owner, being irresponsible, could neither claim nor merit praise; yet, is it ever pleasant, and far more than pleasant, to behold one's human

treasures, no matter how undeservedly, shine lustrously in the firmament of this world's glory. We loved the homage paid to our painted toys when children, shivered into atoms as they were an hour afterwards; no matter, we loved the homage then, we love it still. As children we acknowledged, as men and women we deny the fact;—therein, and therein alone, lies the difference.

CHAPTER X.

“ Arise ! This day shall shine,
For evermore,
To thee a star divine,
On Time’s dark shore.

“ Till now thy soul has been
All glad and gay,
Bid it awake, and look
At grief to-day.

“ No shade has come between
Thee and the sun,
Like some long, childish dream
Thy life has run.

“ But now the stream has reached
A dark, deep sea,
And sorrow, dim and crowned,
Is waiting thee.”

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

LADY ADELAIDE arrived in town the ensuing week, and lost no time in finding her way to Mrs. Templeton’s house. May could not understand her. She was changed—no one could doubt it who had once known her as May did—but not to her or hers. The poison of the world might have altered Adelaide in other respects, but had left their friendship as yet unscathed. Adelaide’s whole mind appeared bent, during the brief period that was to elapse before her marriage, not only in squeezing out of life as much enjoyment as possible on her own account, but in imposing a similar necessity on her friends. Riding, driving, sight-seeing in the morning, ball and opera in the evening, left little time

unoccupied for graver thoughts or employment, and as Adelaide insisted on procuring the Miss Templetons' society whenever they could by any possibility be spared from home, and Mrs. Templeton's happiness really depending in no little measure on the thought of her darlings being once more cared for and made much of, especially by Lady Adelaide, to whom she was affectionately attached, the old Haseldyne party, Arthur's presence excepted, was once again complete. The Cunninghams and Mr. Egerton, more particularly the latter, were frequent guests at Hyde Park Gardens, Lady Adelaide's present home. It would be difficult to say which of the Templeton sisters Mr. Egerton most admired, so enthusiastic was he on both sides when talking them over with Augusta, the usual confidant of all his little secrets, notwithstanding the cold water she invariably threw on anything approaching a *bond fide* love affair on the part of young men like himself, who, not having sixpence a week to keep a wife upon, would only be making themselves and other people wretched by committing the unutterable folly of falling in love till they had. All stuff to tell her they could not help it; people could help doing or not doing anything, if they chose to try. *Must* was the word for this world; he ought to be as well aware of it as herself. Frank Egerton paid little attention to all this rhetoric, neither did it the least interfere with his cousinly confidantship. It might have been that he had discovered concealed beneath this assumed indifference for the weakness of human nature a vein of unconscious sympathy lurking in Augusta's breast, or it might have been that, after the fashion of men, he preferred talking to a woman who contradicted him, solely for the gratification of contradicting her in return, and in the end proving to his own, if not to her satisfaction, the superiority of his own opinions; or still more probably it may have happened, that, never having been, as Augusta

designated the misfortune, *bonâ fide* in love, he found no difficulty whatsoever in attending to her advice. Be the reason what it may, it is certain that Mr. Egerton went on talking, laughing, admiring, and walking quite as recklessly on the edge of love's precipice subsequently to, as before his cousin's eloquent address on the folly, if not wickedness, of his conduct in this respect. Frank Egerton, whom we have as yet but casually introduced to our readers, was one of the portionless junior members of the late Sir Guy Egerton's family, a gentleman of property in the county of —. His father, in bestowing upon his younger sons a liberal education in the fullest extent of the word, believed that his obligations in aiding their future contests with the world and its difficulties had been fulfilled.

Eustace, the eldest, to whom, on Sir Guy's decease, the entire property descended, had, after a short career of reckless extravagance, been compelled to mortgage almost the whole of the fine and proudly cared-for estate, for many a generation past the home of his ancestors. Frank Egerton, the second son, a generous-hearted fellow, the very opposite of Eustace, had, owing to this, resigned his intention of studying for the bar, and had but recently quitted college, in the hope of meeting with some employment, enabling him to maintain his two youngest brothers, Charles and Frederic, a year or two longer at school than would otherwise have been possible, Eustace Egerton's death-bed promise to his father on this point having been already forgotten, or at least rendered impracticable by the personal difficulties in which he was involved. Frank Egerton's was neither the age nor disposition to be easily discouraged by the frequent disappointment attendant on his search after a position more easily talked of in busy England than attained. Happy are the sanguine; Fortune frowns for them in vain; they pay her back in smiles—in youth at least—and even long

after youth has glided by. Frank Egerton was one of these ; he was never down-hearted ; something would always turn up by-and-by, whatever the present disaster. Meanwhile, where lay the wisdom or necessity of fretting oneself into a fever, or sitting down under a fit of the "blues," because Fate for a while had rudely turned her back upon one ? She would come round again presently, and, like a wilful coquette, reward those first who had treated her with the most indifference. Under the present dilemma, dancing attendance for a week or two upon Lady Adelaide and her beautiful guests would be keeping his spirits up to the sticking-point, and have anything but the effect of unfitting him for work, when work condescended to beckon him forward ; on the contrary, his hand would be all the more vigorous for life's battle, fight it here or abroad.

During this pleasant little repose by the wayside, Rachel Templeton, whose childlike simplicity and gaiety of character chimed in completely with his own disposition, attracted, as far as conversation went, the larger portion of Mr. Egerton's attention and interest ; May being still considered, as on the first evening of their introduction, too vividly like an old master's vision of the Madonna, to be approached with the same amount of careless intimacy as her little merry sister. As to comparisons, they were, he decided, worse than absurd. Who ever dreamt of comparing the relative perfections of early dawn and summer twilight—of violet or lily ? People might talk a good deal of having favourite flowers, but bring them to close quarters, and they were fain to confess the equal, if not superior, merits of another ; some hidden association might have planted the first heart-deep, but its claims to the beautiful neither gained nor lost one inch in the eyes of others on that account, and others' eyes are clearer than our own sometimes—*always* when we love, be it but a summer flower. As to May's concert difficulties, they were

rather increased than diminished by Lady Adelaide's residence in London. Perfectly aware that should the latter become acquainted with their loss, and her consequent exertions, no stone would be left unturned—no inconvenience considered insurmountable on Adelaide's part to set aside the necessity of one dear to her gaining a livelihood by this entire sacrifice of taste and feeling, May saw no hope of escape from her generosity save in continued concealment; fortunately, as May considered it on her own account, Adelaide's love for music appeared fully satisfied this season by attendance three times a week at the Opera House—concerts were voted a bore, much too quiet and unexciting; and as St. Clair was seldom absent from his sister's side, occupied in attending to her slightest wish, whenever Sir Allan, the most devoted of lovers, allowed him the opportunity, May had little fear on his account. This, however, did not keep either him or Adelaide from frequent expressed or unexpressed surmises on May's repeated refusals, spite of Mrs. Templeton's known wish to the contrary, to accompany Rachel on her almost daily visits to their house, sending Algernon as a frequent substitute to *chaperon* her sister thither. Rachel always appeared so distressed when referred to on May's non-appearance, that both Lady Adelaide and her brother at last agreed the kinder plan would be to drop the subject altogether, and consent, for the first time in their lives, to be kept altogether in the dark as regarded May and her proceedings. This determination, however, to one party in question, proved no easy task as time went on, spite of his heroic declaration to the contrary that first evening in Mrs. Forrester's ball-room; his promise then given, to say the truth, having being a somewhat rash one; for people who trust thus fearlessly in others, naturally expect a little confidence in return. By degrees a tacit reserve sprang up between them when

they did meet; he seemed afraid of asking questions, even the most trivial, lest they should verge on forbidden ground, and unwittingly cause annoyance; while May, who in warmth of manner was easily driven backward, became cold and silent in his society, and shunned anything approaching their old friendly *têtes-à-tête* with a nervous dread, the sight of which could not fail to send a fresh pang of wounded feeling through the heart she was so bent on sparing a moment's anxiety—unto worse than fruitless had the loving effort proved—a hard lesson to learn at twenty. Could she undo her work? was the next question. Not at present, was the reply; the means of growing independent had been placed within her reach by a Hand more powerful to shelter—a Heart more tender to compassionate than even Lord St. Clair's. Hers should not be the voice to cast a stumbling-block in the path of duty such an acknowledgment to him would, she felt more and more, most certainly be a means of erecting, for the paltry motive of sweeping away in restless impatience a misunderstanding which, without any fault on her part, had arisen between them. It was hard to bear—harder than aught else had been in her present conflict; but not *too hard*. Oh no, that were an impossibility; besides, it would all be explained some day, perhaps, and the tell-tale colour flew to her cheek. Oh! that bright “some day;” how many have looked forward to, and then set out to follow that heart's will-o'-the-wisp “o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent,” till their feet have stumbled on the dark mountains of disappointment, and they have awakened with a start to find themselves as far distant from that delusive “some day,” as at first starting out; and the travellers, in very weariness, are fain to fall down in despair at the mountain's base, till from behind its gloomy heights a light more steady and more brilliant than the *ignis fatuus*, beguiling them thither, gradually arises, and glancing on the falling tears—rainbows

pierce the darkness, within whose curve is still written "some day," and then find themselves ascending the passes, drawn by unseen hands, and murmuring involuntarily, as it seems, so calm and placid are the tones, words first lisped on nurse or mother's knee, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Lady Adelaide's two last months of girlhood passed, as the rest of life passes, very quickly, and the wedding morning arrived. Veil, orange-blossoms, milliners and bridesmaids, did their united best to enliven both scene and bride. The sun aided their exertions, for never did a brighter one arise over woodland-forest or London chimney-top. Neither let the Countess of Morley's affectionate zeal in lending all possible enlivenment to the scene be overlooked. Her face, radiant with loving congratulation in the bride's future prospects, vied with the sunshine in embellishing all around. Few tears were shed; indeed, as many of the guests remarked, never had they been present at a gayer or less tearless wedding. St. Clair's were dried away, public display of feeling not being in his line. He had attended six o'clock mass that morning, to pray for Adelaide, his sister and his darling;—what wonder if the prayer brought tears!—the brother's guardianship was over—its protecting tenderness at an end, or, at least, from henceforth of secondary importance. Another and a dearer love carried far away from him the sister of his childhood—God grant it might prove as true a one! May and Rachel had probably wept theirs also out of sight; for though chief bridesmaids, and therefore bound by the example of all preceding young ladies in their position to cry their eyes red, they did nothing of the sort. Perhaps, as one of the young ladies observed afterwards to another, the Miss Templetons thought red eyes unbecoming—very likely. It is an indisputable fact that very few faces, indeed,

look the better for tears. And if none of those, who then to shed one over the bride, as she glided from her father's roof, leaving childhood and its day-dreams behind her? Not the Earl himself, he never yet having been known to plead guilty to any such childish weakness—not even at his first wife's death. And that wife—that mother—was she near her child, as she passed away, thus silently, under another's care? It may have been so—nearer, perchance, than the rest of the wedding circle, and yet no tears either might fall from her sweet eyes, since they had long been wiped away, only not as we kiss them from each other's cheeks down here, to be shed again next day.

Three clergymen managed, between them, to get through the long and fatiguing ceremony of uniting the Lady Adelaide Constance Manners, eldest daughter of the Earl of Morley, to Sir Allan Markham Mansfield, only surviving son of the late Sir Reginald Mansfield, of Layton Manor, Cheshire.

Then came the sumptuous wedding-breakfast, with its proper accompaniments of formality and display. Various toasts were proposed and speeches commenced, of whose conclusion the audience, no less than ourselves, are to this day delightfully ignorant.

"Everything in this world comes to an end sooner or later, and wedding-breakfasts are no exception to the rule," exclaimed Lady Adelaide Mansfield, as she tossed the long Brussels veil from her head, and then playfully arranged its snowy folds around Rachel, who was standing with her back towards the bride, and turned round in surprise at finding herself thus suddenly enveloped. "What a pretty bride you would make, Rachel," continued Adelaide, in a tone of such sad and—if we may use the expression—stern merriment, that it went to May's very heart; "I wonder who will follow my example, and take the veil next, you or May?"

"Take the veil, indeed!" cried Rachel, laughing, "you seem to forget that taking the veil with us means a very different thing to your way of doing it."

"No, I don't, you simple child; I was just thinking, as I spoke the words, what a very different thing it must be. I don't see, after all, why nuns are to be so dreadfully pitied. I dare say it is a very happy life to those who are good enough to like it."

"But who ever dreamt of pitying them?" asked Rachel, with a look of unfeigned astonishment; "we are a great deal more likely to envy than to pity the good nuns."

"I can assure you—yes—of course, *you do*; but I am talking of Protestants. We always, for the most part, look upon them as a poor deluded set of ill-used creatures, shut up within stone walls, which nothing short of disappointed hopes and blighted affections would ever have induced them to enter; while we married ladies are supposed to have arrived at the height of earthly bliss by having provided ourselves, or having been provided, with its indispensable requisite—a husband. But I see, by May's face of funereal gravity, we are treading on dangerous ground now, Rachel; so suppose you help me to finish dressing, and the next time you and I meet alone, we will discuss the matter more fully." And Adelaide ran off on some other subject, talking incessantly, first to one and then to another, as if her tongue would never tire, or gaiety flag, till two o'clock struck—the hour fixed for her departure; and then, without waiting for the announcement of her carriage, or to say good-bye, she hurried below, and in a few moments afterwards, Sir Allan and his wife had taken their departure for Layton Manor, intending to proceed next day to the Continent.

The only guests remaining any length of time behind were either relatives or intimate friends of the bride and

bridegroom's different families ; it having been arranged by Lord St. Clair that these last, including the bridesmaids, as a matter of course, should drive or ride some miles into the country, and spend a short time at Harewood, the seat of one of the Earl of Morley's brothers. May, Rachel, and three other young ladies, were to be of the riding-party, escorted by a troop of gentlemen, among whom Frank Egerton took good care to enrol himself. On arriving at Harewood, they rested their horses awhile, and walked through the park and grounds, returning for a rapid visit to the picture-galleries and various points of interest with which the old manor-house abounded. After an early cup of tea, the riding-party once more remounted, intending to visit a newly-built church, a few miles distant, reported to be well worth the trouble of looking over. The less enthusiastic carriage guests proposed remaining at Harewood till the riders' return. The whole party then proceeding to London for a merry family supper, as Mr. Egerton was pleased to surname the repast "a severe tea"—the most sociable and pleasant of all other meals, as he invited every one present to agree with him in considering it, and there were few contradictory voices.

"How nicely the day has passed off," observed Mr. Egerton, as he assisted May to remount, and then guided his horse to her side, while St. Clair rode forward to Rachel, a timid horsewoman at all times, and never thoroughly at her ease, except under his escort and protection.

"Yes," replied May, rather abstractedly, a fault not often laid at her door ; "the weather and Lord St. Clair appear to have been laying their heads together for our benefit, and for some purpose. This charming ride was the most sensible idea in the world, after all that excitement. I wonder who put it into his head ?"

"No other but his own thoughtful self, I fancy," said

Mr. Egerton. "St. Clair is generally both founder and carrier-out of the greater number of agreeable plans for the amusement of others, I have ever had the good fortune to share in. He is a downright brick, and no mistake. How long have you known him, Miss Templeton, if it is not an impertinent question?"

But May's answer is left unrecorded, for the very excusable reason that it was altogether unheard, as a sudden halt in front brought hers and Mr. Egerton's horses to a stand-still, while the object of the latter's inquiry rising in his saddle, and forming a very passable penny-trumpet of his right hand, begged to inform all whom the news might concern, that as they were on the eve of entering one of the narrowest of all possible lanes, it would become necessary, much as he regretted the obligation, to form their noble regiment into single defile, each gentleman in humble submission, following his lady, or *vice versa*, whichever arrangement recommended itself more agreeably to the gallantry of the nineteenth century. He himself would head the defile, and give timely intimation of all coming dangers in the shape of hay-waggons or led riding-horses' destroyers, possibly strolling in the distance, and bent on human prey. After a little trotting up and down, and a small display of fashionable affectation on the part of one rather nervous young lady, who was positively certain that should a hay-waggon really meet them some awful accident would infallibly ensue, and who could not, till after multiplied assurances, be convinced that no waggon would have the rashness to venture up a lane of insufficient width to admit her horse and another person's abreast, the arrangement was at length completed, and the modest little lane's retirement broken in upon by the entrance of more visitors than since its creation it had probably ever before been honoured with.

The simple beauty of the scene rewarded and amply

compensated our equestrian friends for every minor deficiency ; each step they advanced did the pathway become more fair in its quiet loveliness. Wild rose, and climbing hedge-lily, greeted them silently as they passed along, and then inquired whisperingly of the breeze—for flowers have voices, reader (it is a language well worth listening to when you've leisure to hearken)—will their life be equally bright ; their death, like ours, smiling and peaceful, when autumn steals hither to hush us to sleep—nay, not sleep—for sleep from which, like ours, there is no awaking, has a drearier name—it is called death ! They are better off than we, murmured the flowers. What, oh, what would we not give to live thus gloriously arrayed one short summer longer ! *Their* lot—for ever—ever ! Ah, were it too dear a boon—tell us, noisy breeze ?—you speak out more loudly than we ? Are they not lightsome, joyous, thankful ?—but the breeze sighed faintly : there was no answer to the lilies' question !

And now the riders reach that long avenue where the trees have agreed to embrace overhead, thus forming a cathedral, beneath whose arches the birds may sing their daily Alleluias, and all things around are chanting a silent *Te Deum*. All, save the birds, they chant it aloud ; and through the leafy branches, down among the distant cow-slip meadows beside the far-off stream, carried by the skylark (nature's acolyte) up to heaven's gate, and then along the aisles in ringing cadence, till its final echo finds repose on the tongue of Cherubim and Seraphim, resounds the same everlasting song—*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth !*

The lane is at an end, and the fresh green sward of an open common spreads invitingly beyond—the horses, weary of their long restraint, try to express by tossing mane and restless feet, their longing to be free ; while their masters, nothing

loth, and merry mistresses, still more ready, give the signal, and then start for a race. How deliciously the fresh turf springs beneath their feet? What more delicious than a breathless gallop in the open country, on a fine summer day?—but what ails Lord St. Clair's horse?—see how the noble creature paws the ground, graceful in its very wilfulness, and now rears as though determined, by throwing its rider, to gratify some proud instinct from within, nor bend that iron strength any longer without a desperate struggle for freedom and independence from the petty tyranny of man. How well Lord St. Clair keeps his seat; no need for trembling, May. Rachel, foolish child, turn not so pale. Is not St. Clair the bravest of horsemen? Who knows it better than yourself; and yet you, of all the party, alone doubt the power of that arm; see the proud animal already subdued—half forced, half coaxed, after the fashion of the human animal, too often into an unwilling angry submission to a will stronger than his own. Nay, he rears again, one more passionate struggle for liberty, and the conqueror is conquered, the vanquished free. Well done, brave horse; well done, for your proud courage, though, alas! for its result. May, you might well tremble. Rachel, you were right to turn pale; they have started, the curb chain is broken, no earthly arm can stay him now; horse and rider have reached the short wood at the boundary of the common, there is a hill beyond, sharp and steep,—they pass out of sight, while the rest gallop rapidly forward; two deeply loving hearts reach the hill long before their horses; but of what use are loving hearts alone in this work-a-day world of ours? hands are wanted, ay, and steady ones too; they also arrive in good time, not one moment too soon; there is work to be done, and work many a young lady-hand would shrink from; and yet is it woman's work, and woman, whether lady or otherwise, must learn to look, when called

upon, with unnerved eye, even on suffering, self for a while forgotten, would she care to be the alleviator. Lord St. Clair is lying besides a heap of stones, but lately cast there in preparation for repairing the road at the foot of the hill ; two or three labouring men in the distance are vainly endeavouring to recover the flying horse, as with lightning pace the now terrified animal madly outstrips his pursuers. The ladies, forgetting, simultaneously, all necessity of aid, dismount quickly, and surround St. Clair, each one hoping to be of use, and all, both ladies and gentlemen, as a matter of course, doing little else than get in one another's way ; as to poor Rachel, her heroism, if she intended laying claim to any, vanished at the first glance of St. Clair's face stained with blood trickling from a narrow, but deeply-cut gash above the right temple ; she gave but one look, and then exclaiming, " He is dead," sank heavily to the ground.

May, who had been more accustomed than her sister to visit the sick at Haseldyne, where, from the district around being a mining one, accidents of one kind or another were of frequent occurrence, was not so easily alarmed. As to St. Clair's either being dead or dying, a moment's touch of the pulse might have made known to even a novice in the history of life's minute clock-work, a different tale. Whispering Mr. Egerton to ride back to Harewood, and bring one or more carriages as quickly as possible, she knelt down by St. Clair's side, and tearing first one, and then another handkerchief held out for the purpose around into narrow strips, she bound them, with the help of another lady, not too frightened to lend assistance, round St. Clair's head and arm, which on raising, was likewise discovered to have received some slight injury. One of the gentlemen who had meanwhile set out on a voyage of discovery, returned ere the bandaging was concluded, with a hunting-cup Mr. Egerton happened to have brought with him, filled to the brim with fresh

spring water from a spring adjoining the common above. The application of a few handfuls to Lord St. Clair's face had the desired effect; he began to move by faint degrees, and in a few moments was able, by the support of one or two gentlemen, to sit up, and realize what one of them called his enviable position, surrounded by so fair a bevy of lady nurses, all intent on ministering—angels as they were—aiding him to emerge from the land of forgetfulness to the one of sunshine, and broken limbs, and welcoming him back again. St. Clair's attempt at a smile was but a poor affair; he felt terribly shaken, and the dizzy swimming sensation always attendant on a recovery from a fall such as he had sustained, rendered the effort to articulate even a few words of thankfulness absolutely sickening. May caught his look of helpless suffering and turned away—crying-time had *not* yet arrived, it might by-and-by, perhaps, venture, for May was but a woman, and could weep in leisure hours, when leisure hours came; but Rachel now claimed her care, she was still unconscious, and upon coming to after a full ten minutes' swoon, recognized none, not even her sister. An ordinary fainting-fit had from Rachel's childhood been so frequent an occurrence when under the influence of any great alarm, that at first sight it caused May no great uneasiness; but when, after another and another effort to induce the pallid lips to speak to her, she still continued looking with a heavy apathetic look into her face, as though her sister were an entire stranger, murmuring as she did so a string of wild, incoherent words, May began to feel seriously uneasy; that this was no mere fainting-fit became evident to all around, when Rachel, with a strength, too surely not her own, rose from the bank on which they were supporting her, and ran with feverish speed, her arms stretched out, as though in search of something lost, towards the hill in the background. Several of the party followed her, calling the poor child gently by

name; while swift as love and fear united could urge her onward, May was by her side, twining her arms round the fairy form as it struggled in her grasp, and strove with strange unnatural violence to escape.

"There come the carriages, thank God!" exclaimed one of the gentlemen, "and Egerton on the coachbox of the Cunninghams, driving at the rate of twenty miles an hour; we shall be all right now."

Mr. Egerton's look of dismay at finding Rachel in the condition we have described, haunted May for weeks afterwards. He looked first from one sister's face to the other, as if at a loss to know which of the two needed most help, while the first expression of grief May had ever had the opportunity of witnessing on his open boyish brow became in the space of that brief glance engraven there, changing him at once from the gay college lad to the man—the man capable of entering into the hidden depths of another's suffering, with fully the same intensity he was wont, as she already knew, to show in the happier tone of their less heavy-laden hours. He did not wait, under the present emergency, to deliberate long; for, taking Rachel into his arms, as though she had been a child of two years old, Mr. Egerton carried her off to one of the carriages, placed May by her side, accompanied by another of the ladies, and then, perceiving the Earl of Morley, and half a dozen other gentlemen, occupied in attending to St. Clair, who was now able to rise and totter to his father's carriage, the young man mounted his horse, and flew rather than rode to town, went immediately to Hamilton-street, and managed, without alarming Mrs. Templeton, to see Phœbe, obtained from her the address of Mr. Dalton—Mrs. Templeton's medical man—and prepared that gentleman without delay for the patient's arrival, describing to him beforehand the circumstances of the case, though,

from having no sisters of his own, he expressed himself at a loss to comprehend how easily women could be frightened out of their senses. It was a sad pity they were so tender-hearted—what was the use of it, except to make things appear worse than they really were. He hoped Mr. Dalton would give an eye to the elder Miss Templeton, she looked almost as ill as her sister, though evidently with three times more pluck.

“They were both worth taking good care of,” observed Mr. Egerton, *sotto voce*, and as if to himself, in conclusion.

Mr. Dalton smiled, and a look of pleased satisfaction lit up his kind penetrating eyes. One might have guessed, from the expression just then, if anything of a tolerable physiognomist, that the old doctor saw more than met the outward eye, at Frank Egerton’s little soliloquy; but then, to be sure, Mr. Dalton wore spectacles, and these endow doctors, and other people also sometimes, with a clearer vision than their neighbours. Mr. Dalton, moreover, was an old friend of the families; and old friends, bless them, are never *very* loth to hear their once young friends’ children praised. His interview with Mr. Dalton being concluded, Frank Egerton passed the time that must intervene ere the arrival of the carriages, in pacing up and down the streets in which the one now containing the Templetons must necessarily pass on its way home. He was standing at the door when it was opened, ready to carry Rachel upstairs, while May was thus enabled to run up and prepare her mother for the invalid’s appearance, saying, she trusted in the end her illness would prove nothing worse than one of her old fainting-fits, increased by the twofold excitement of the past day—Adelaide’s wedding to begin with, and St. Clair’s unhappy accident. But May was mistaken; Mr. Dalton looked graver than usual on seeing Rachel, who still continued talking wildly at intervals, and singing

snatches of songs or hymns she had learnt in years gone by at Haseldyne ; he ordered leeches to her temples, and a blister behind the head, which must be partially shaved, he hoped not altogether, unless the symptoms to brain fever—a fear he could not help entertaining—should increase. He made the best of the case to Mrs. Templeton, but attempted no concealment of the real facts of the matter to her daughter. Mr. Dalton always made a point of letting one person in the family know the exact state of his patient's condition, and, as a rule, had seldom found occasion for regret in so doing. A knowledge of the worst that may occur has not unfrequently an exhilarating rather than depressing effect on sick-bed attendants, especially when hired on Love's cheap wages—strength, mental strength, at least, if not physical, generally rises in proportion to its demand, followed, may be, afterwards (for sooner or later tyrant nature will revenge herself) by as sudden a prostration. No matter—nursing has its present like everything else, and it is with that a physician has to cope, and his nurses also, be they father, mother, sister, or friend. It was one of May's hardest trials having to cut off Rachel's long bright hair; but Mr. Dalton insisted on it, adding, that humanly speaking, everything depended on the strictest compliance with his directions. His patient must be kept perfectly quiet, not more than one person in the room at a time, and, if possible, only herself for the present ; he would himself persuade Mrs. Templeton of the necessity, and prevent her own health suffering, as far as his influence went, on Rachel's account. His next inquiry, and he hesitated for a moment before making it, lest the question should invoke any sorrowful reply, was to ascertain whether Rachel's mind had been in any way agitated or disturbed during the past few weeks or months. Her present suffering appearing to him more like the result of some deep-

seated mental reaction than the mere fright attendant on the accident. May's reply was in the entire negative. Family troubles had certainly occurred during the course of the last winter, but had in a great measure passed away, neither were they of a nature to take lasting hold on Rachel's mind, which, as he knew, was naturally elastic, and quickly directed from anything like morbid contemplation of sorrow. Indeed, as May remarked, with tears in her eyes, she had particularly noticed of late how entirely Rachel had regained her old childish gaiety, interrupted and crushed down as it had been for a while by her father's death and Arthur's departure for India; "but this, my dear child," rejoined Mr. Dalton, "is the very question; you mistake me altogether. What I mean is simply this, that if your little sister has had any increase, any cause of increased happiness lately, especially any that brings along with it some degree of excitement, her mind would naturally be predisposed to what she is now suffering under, especially if the accident may have had any immediate connection with the happy feelings I allude to." Mr. Dalton did not choose, for some reason or another, to speak more plainly; he was a pretty close observer, and in the frequent visits Mrs. Templeton's protracted ill health obliged him to pay to her sick room, had obtained many an opportunity lately of witnessing various little occurrences in the family, apparently trivial ones, from which he had been led to draw conclusions Rachel's illness by no means tended to dispel. How much or how little May's own feelings might be implicated in the matter, Mr. Dalton was at a loss to ascertain, though a shrewd guess, not unaccompanied by a sigh, did occasionally cross his mind. For this reason, if for no other, Mr. Dalton, like a wise man, let alone a considerate one, thought it best merely to touch the subject, he knew May well enough to believe she would not leave long unravelled, be the result

what it would. Bidding her, therefore, should any lucid interval occur during the course of the night (not an unlikely possibility) to set her sister's mind at rest on Lord St. Clair's account, adding emphatically that the sooner the knowledge of his safety was communicated the better it might, even under Providence, be the means of saving Rachel's life, the old doctor took leave, desiring Phœbe, ere he left the house, to let him know at once, should any change for the worse take place in her young lady's appearance, otherwise it would not be necessary to call again till the morning. May stood for some time after Mr. Dalton had left the room without moving from the spot where they had parted, trying in vain to discover what possible construction to draw from the words he had left ringing behind him. "Any increased cause for happiness," "reaction of some deep-seated feeling," "immediate connection with Lord St. Clair's accident." It was altogether an enigma. What *could* he mean?

A call from Rachel attracted her attention; she wanted to know whether May was ready to go out walking—Papa had his hat on and was waiting for her, and so were Arthur and Adelaide and St. Clair; he had just arrived by the train, and had brought such beautiful wild flowers from the London hedges for her and May—if May would only come—come—come. Then she laid her head down again, as if exhausted, and was quiet for a while, and May resumed her meditation. Cause for happiness, she knew of none, except the excitement—no one could call it happiness—of Adelaide's wedding and St. Clair's return from abroad,—that of course was an intense happiness to both of them; he was, and always had been, like a brother to Rachel, and to—to herself also until lately, when this reserve—and May sighed deeply, oh! how deeply—had sprung up between them on account of her unfortunate secret. She

almost wished it had never been made into one, only she had acted for the best. Alas! what better could she do in this weary mystery-laden world. But Rachel had nothing to do with this, she was not even aware of it, and besides, it was *happiness* Mr. Dalton had alluded to, not sorrow—she kept forgetting that—her mind was just then so full of the latter. Could he mean—how very odd *if he* really did—that Rachel, unknowingly to her, had formed any attachment, and that it was this that filled her heart with a strange new gladness, rendering it at the same time more susceptible of suffering. There was some sense, some truth, in that idea. Love and suffering were fellow-companions here, she had learnt that lesson well; but then, dear child, this was not likely, she was so young, so very young; and besides, who of their acquaintance was there to attract her? They had so few intimate friends, none, indeed, except Augusta and Mr. Egerton; and Rachel, with all her impulsiveness of disposition, was not a girl to form hasty attachments. Her very timidity would keep her from incurring the latter danger. She was ever more clinging than impetuous in affection. True, Mr. Egerton and herself had seen a good deal of each other, had been mixed up far more intimately than acquaintances of much longer standing often are, and he evidently admired her—who could help it? May might, without much vanity, have remembered Mr. Egerton's equally undisguised admiration for some one else; but, wrapped up in other thoughts, the fact escaped her observation, or, at least, her memory; but even their friendship with *him*, she continued thinking, pleasant, easy as it doubtless was, had not yet been of anything like sufficient duration for him to have won, supposing even that he wished it, her little Rachel's timid trustful love. It would not be the growth of a month or two that violet-like love, when it did spring up, and had not as yet, May was firmly persuaded,

taken root in Rachel's unconscious laughing heart. Mr. Dalton was mistaken, if this was his supposition. "Save her life!" the words came swelling back on her memory; "Save her life!" then she may *die*. Oh, my Rachel—and May knelt down by the bedside, and noiselessly opening the curtains, gazed long and silently on the fevered face as it tossed to and fro on the pillow, seeking in vain for rest. The parched lips, as though weary of talking aloud, were muttering unintelligible words. Sometimes they seemed those of prayer,—for she would look up now and then as May had often seen her do in church, with a mute beseeching helplessness, as if imploring Him who was all strength, to pity and aid her weakness; to spare her life on earth a little longer, ere He recalled it for ever to His Bosom. Her very *life*, oh, God! it is part of my own. That little life, so bright, so pure, so innocent, so beautiful, so full of love to all around—to me, her poor May, more than all, her life! Ah, if it be Thy sweet will, leave it to us for a while; teach me what he meant; let me but help to save it, even by the sacrifice of my own, to save it. This was May's prayer. It was answered, ah! how speedily. Rachel looked round; the last words had been uttered aloud, they had disturbed her, and she once more began to stare in the old wild, unmeaning way, a fresh paroxysm was at hand, but not so violent in its character as the preceding ones had proved. It passed over, and she began to talk as before, not, however, with the same incoherence; by degrees, the tone became more pleading, and the words assumed a deeper meaning than those of mere delirium, heretofore conveyed to the sister's watchful ear. The answer to May's prayer was not far distant. She had but to wait an hour or two—were all our prayers answered thus swiftly, should we be thankful? Let the wind and waves reply, they know more about it than we. Midnight came, and still Rachel

talked, nay, chattered on, and her theme in its unvarying monotony was ever the same ; one name hung on her lips—one memory, amid the wreck of all beside, clung with untiring tenacity to the clouded spirit within—whose that name—whose that memory—the reader has already divined—the physician's warning remains for May alone to solve. Lord St. Clair, from first to last, from last to first, was the burden of that night's long weary song. Now he was a little boy, playing with them at Haseldyne, and chasing her round the garden. Then he was abroad with Arthur, and oh ! when—when would the long watched-for ship bring him home ? Soon afterwards he was teaching her drawing, and she feigning a stupidity foreign to her natural talent, in order, with love's artful and yet artless wiles, to attract a larger portion of attention from her master. Then the scene would become suddenly metamorphosed : he was dying, and springing up in the bed, she would kneel down and entreat God to spare his life, or to let her die along with him, or take her life instead of his. It was piteous to listen to her passionate pleading—to watch that once bright face, so changed, so agonized. May listened to her, trembling with anguish beyond all human words to express. Was it possible ? Could it, indeed, be so ? No ; surely not. Rachel, with her merry childlike ways, free from care or thought as a summer bird, her heart on her lip, and that lip ever ready to hide its inmost thought within the sanctuary of an elder sister's bosom ; had *SHE* learnt to love already—to love in secret, and to love *him*, and that with such impassioned earnestness, that the uncalled-for fear of his death had undermined her reason, perhaps cost her very life ? Again arose the plaintive tones, “ Oh ! Father, spare him ! Our Father, who art in heaven, listen to me, pray listen to me. I am but a poor weak child ; forgive me if I have loved him too much. I will not love him more than

Thee; he is so good and kind and holy, he will help me also to be good. I want his help, for I am weak. Do not—do not take him from me; but, ah! it is too late; he is dead—dead—dead—no joy, no love.” May hesitated no longer; the time for action had arrived, the last words were not those of delirium. She once more opened the curtains and bent forward. Rachel knew her, and tried to smile, and hold out her hand. May pressed it caressingly to her lips, and dashing back the tears Rachel’s smile had brought there, she said, in her usual placid tone, “Look at me, darling.” The command was obeyed, and one point gained; the poor mind was for a moment diverted, and a moment taken at advantage, whether in the moral or physical world, may be the crisis of victory. “Rachel, darling child,” continued May, taking her other hand from the counterpane on which it was lying, and holding both tightly within her own while she gazed steadfastly at her, “Have I ever told you an untruth?”

“*You—you—May?*” said Rachel, with a still brighter smile. “What a funny question! Of course not.”

“Well, then, you must believe what I am going to tell you now, and then go to sleep like a good child. St. Clair is not seriously injured; he will soon recover.”

Rachel started up, and sought to disengage her hands. “It is not true,” she replied, in an accent of despair; “he is dead!”

“No, he is not dead, Rachel,” and May forced her gently back to the pillow. “It is very wrong, very wicked of you, to speak in that way when I tell you he is getting better.”

“Alive! alive!” repeated Rachel, raising her hand to her head, which the exertion of rising had again disturbed. “Say the word once more, dear angel, it sounds like music. How white your robe looks? Have you just come down from

heaven? Have you brought a robe for me? What did you say?"

"He is alive, Rachel; and if you are good, you shall see him in a few days; but you must first leave off talking in this foolish way, and try to sleep. Come, now, darling; you love to be obedient, do you not? Don't you remember that beautiful scroll you and dear St. Clair were illuminating for me? I want you to get well and finish it. Do you recollect the words?"

May had touched the right chord at last. Tears, the first May had ever felt thankful to see in her sister's eyes, rose to Rachel's, as she sobbed out in broken tones the sentence she and St. Clair had been so busy preparing together two short days before: "Obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." May did not interrupt or attempt to soothe away the blessed tears. Too thankful for the present mercy, for retrospection of the past or thought on the future, she remained a calm and grateful spectator till Rachel's sobbing was exhausted, and then, bathing her face and head with cold water as a preparation for sleep, she whispered, as Rachel closed her worn-out eyes,

"How good God is, darling; is He not?"

"Yes," answered the happy face, as it sank into forgetfulness. How different a one from the last six hours' torture. Yes, answered the prayerful moon, as she stole into the room to talk about heaven, if any one were there to listen; and if not, to shine down upon them with the silver glory she had borrowed; thence, while they slept, stealing meekly away again, long ere the sleepers were up to bless her. Yes, answered the stars, as they sang their nightly "Gloria in excelsis." Yes, replied the still night, keeping hovering vigil over the world beneath, and striving meekly reverent, if it were possible, to exclude the sight of man's iniquity from his Creator's too piercing vision on high. Yes, replied

all earth in chorus—no, not all, we forget the dissenting voices, who in act and deed, if not with tongue, contradicted the assertion. But we tarry not to listen to these—we have response enough without.

Hour after hour fled by, and still Rachel slept, while May, now at leisure to ponder over the past, leant back, with folded arms, in the chair by her bedside, not asleep, nor even dozing; never had sat by patient's couch, spite of the past day's heavy fatigue, a more wakeful nurse; lost in meditation, the flight of time hurried by unnoticed. In the new light Rachel's words had flooded in upon her memory a thousand little circumstances, thought nothing of at the time they happened, returned with lightning speed to her recollection. Rachel was right. St. Clair had been kind, gentle, tender, almost too much so, perhaps; and she, alas! poor child, had mistaken that tenderness. No great wonder, and more than enough excuse; she, Rachel's sister, would at all events be the last to condemn; besides, what right had any one to say that Rachel was less to St. Clair than—another? The best men even were changeable. It might be, after all, by herself he had been treated with want of confidence, and had evidently resented it—felt, perchance, more deeply on the subject than he cared to let her see. Rachel was trustful, open-hearted, simple, and St. Clair loved simplicity; she was half a child, besides, and with her gentle, clinging, unselfish disposition, might easily be trained into a perfect wife. Roused at length into a painful remembrance of the self-deception her love for Rachel was allowing her to practise, and weary of the attempt, May's thoughts wandered off to Haseldyne and childhood, her garden and school-children and poor people, all, more or less, entwined with its memories. Nor was her father's face long absent, or Arthur's either, in those long, joyous days they had spent together, happy themselves, and yet never resting in that

happiness till all around them, young and old, rich and poor, were partakers in that happiness; and then imagination travelled back with rapid step to London, to its busy, toilsome life, so fraught with care and difficulty; and Rachel's image stood in the foreground, with her golden hair and bright face; then the pale, wan spectre of the last few hours; and now, lying placid and beautiful, as at May's words the threatened sorrow had vanished into nothingness. What would be that darling sister's fate? Surely, oh! surely, not like many another whose history she had heard and read of; surely, if not at present, yet in time, he might learn to care for her with more than a brother's friendship. He was clear-sighted enough on most matters; the cause of her illness, if she recovered—God forbid otherwise—would not long be a mystery to St. Clair, and Rachel's love was a winning thing—irresistibly winning; for the rest, who could blame her? Who could blame any one for idolizing St. Clair? Was he not all that a woman's heart could cling to and reverence, and had he not become linked around both her and Rachel's heart, not only by the memory of the past, but by his unchanged bearing, his even increased friendliness towards them since poverty and misfortune had laid rude hand within their own? It had not been thus with all—no, nor half their former so-called friends. Misfortune, in many interpretations of the word, does not necessarily estrange these; on the contrary, there is a grandeur hidden under some of sorrow's phases, the most worldly among us can afford to recognize. The sympathy that costs nothing, touching neither pride nor pocket, is a coin, on the whole, pretty freely circulated in society; but *poverty*—here behold the sin that cannot be forgiven, the deadly crime the world's sanctity has alone deemed unpardonable.

Sickened and disgusted, she has turned away, passed by on the other side. Well for those who, with smiling eye,

can watch her retreating footstep ; still better if across that smile linger no tinge of bitterness. But to return to May. Was there any earthly means within her power of furthering Rachel's happiness—of saving her from life's worst and dreariest doom,—a disappointed first love ? Was her own weak hand utterly powerless to avert the blow ? If not, should one stone be left unturned to secure that sleeping child's repose, whose life that night had as it were been placed within her hand, granted to her prayer ? But where the weapon woman might venture in such a cause fearlessly to employ ? There was but one, and the edge was sharp to the touch, keener than warrior's sword ; dare she stretch out a bold finger to grasp it ? Dared she strive, by a guarded yet pointed estrangement on her own part, to crush the preference a twenty years' acquaintance with St. Clair's character, and total absence of affectation in her own, could not but convince her was slumbering beneath the exterior reserve he had chosen lately to adopt—a reserve, it needed but a few syllables of hers to sweep to the winds, and which, a strict sense of duty—a morbidly strict sense, perchance, and if so, one to be reconsidered, had alone prevented her uttering ? Did it seem right to allow the *chance* (for, after all, it was *but* chance) of securing Rachel's happiness to risk the loss of *his* ? Ah ! this indeed was a different question, more ten thousand fold than the rest ; and yet, might not this even possibly be also a temptation—a temptation to shrink back from the cross—to shrink away 'neath the coward guise of a self-chosen duty ? A sob from the bed arrested her attention. Rachel was dreaming. No human love, not even May's, might ward off sad dreams from those fair white eyelids, as, weighed down with slumber so deep it might almost have been death, their long-fringed lashes swept the dimpled cheek beneath. May raised the drooping head for a moment, and slightly altered its position. The

lips parted, they sought to speak; but the words died away into a smile. Never in her brightest days had Rachel worn a look so spirit-like before.

"Great God! how beautiful thy creatures are," said May aloud, as, half in awe, she watched that look. "Thy Own uncreated Beauty, what must it be to gaze on? Ah! give her earthly love, if it be Thy will; only, O Fountain of Love unceasing, let that earthly love serve but to lead her on to Thee. He will be happy with her, Father, if Thou do but bless their love."

Who could but be happy with Rachel by his side? With this prayer and hope, May's resolution was at length sealed. She would treat St. Clair with growing indifference; their present little misunderstanding would stand her in good need now. How strangely like a child's puzzle was her life becoming—the pieces each coming to hand one by one as they were sought for, and fitting in with wondrous exactitude the vacant spaces awaiting their arrival. When would the puzzle be concluded, and the last vacancy filled up? No man could stand indifference long, or woman either; anything and everything else, but not this. Sooner or later, indifference must prove sexton to toll Love's passing knell. He would suffer awhile, he would not believe her false, cold-hearted, deceitful, all at once; he would give her a long trial, a terribly long one; but in the end would give it up, and then be happy—God grant it—happy as the day was long, with her loving, her beautiful Rachel; and for herself—herself, the thought came at last, and May laid her aching head upon Rachel's pillow, clasping her cold hands above to still the miserable throbbing, no further effort for self-control could hinder from gaining mastery. Afraid, at last, of disturbing her sister, she walked to the window, which, owing to their room being situated at the back of the house, looked out on a neighbouring garden, a sufficiently

minute one, indeed, after the fashion of London gardens in general, and of the Templetons' locality in particular; but still a garden, and in summer time a gay and shady one withal, the property of a widow lady, mother of the host of little ones playing from hour to hour up and down among the half-dozen trees bordering the pathway, or in and out of the trellissed arbour decorated with clematis and the star-like jasmine at the extremity. This garden had been one of poor Mrs. Templeton's greatest luxuries during the past spring; she would sit the whole afternoon, weather permitting, by the open window, reading and working by turns, or watching the children's games, at which her own little Algernon not unfrequently figured conspicuously; he having become acquainted with one of the boys at school, who, as a matter of course, had given his mamma timely notice of the pretty little fellow next door being in the same class as himself, and of their being such great friends. The result of this intelligence had been a pleasant acquaintanceship between the two families, and an invitation gladly accepted for Master Algernon to come and play with Mrs. Markham's children, whenever he felt disposed, or Mrs. Templeton could spare him.

Among the trees we have spoken of was one, a greater favourite than the rest with the little ones, who had baptized it by the name of the "silver poplar," the tree that never would leave off shaking, if they were ever so quiet. Often had they stood for ten minutes together, a long interval to spare from blind man's buff, or "here we go round the gooseberry bush," watching the restless tree with wondering curiosity, as the leaves swayed to and fro in the sunshine; but upon Algernon's telling them, upon his sister May's authority, that they were mistaken in calling their favourite the "silver poplar," and, that "aspen tree" was the right name, and when, in addition to this intelligence, he related

sister May's legend on the subject, the children's eyes opened wide, and the next game of "blind man's buff" played beneath its shadow was less boisterous in character; while from that day forward the aspen tree became endued with a certain reverential, "shadow-like imagery," never afterwards forgotten.

May stood motionless by the window, on the night we are alluding to, gazing out into this garden. Not a breeze disturbed the atmosphere around, the air was sultry, even stifling, for lack of a single breath to ruffle its serenity; yet, there stood the children's aspen tree, shivering in the silence, the leaves glancing more silvery white than in glare of day-time. May's eye this evening fell upon tree and garden alike with total want of interest. There are phases of feeling under the influence of which outward objects, however fair, however well loved at other times, cease to attract attention. The tree and its legend—the foolish legend the widow's children believed so faithfully—were for a while forgotten. How the saints of old had accounted for its trembling, and had laid the tree's eternal shudder to the memory of the awful past. How the Catholic peasant, poor, superstitious man, had treasured the tradition, and in the nineteenth century still secretly believed that

"The Cross, on which the meek Redeemer bow'd His head,
Was framed of aspen wood;
And that since that hour, through all its race,
The pale tree hath sent down a thrilling consciousness,
Making the branches tremulous—when not a breeze
Disturbs the airy thistle-down,
Or shakes the bright lines of the shining gossamer."

It is uncertain by what train of feeling these lines, old favourites with May, at length forced entrance on her mind; but as they did so she started, and kneeling down by the

window, gazed out wistfully, more wistfully than heretofore, at the aspen's trembling branches; for May also, educated and enlightened woman as she ought to have been, did not walk in clearer light than the poor Nazarean peasant of the first century, or simple religious of the dark ages—superstition or not superstition, she was weak enough, without blaming others, less troubled with credulity, to lend believing ear to this and many another tradition attainted of a similar unreality. It was curious enough to watch the tenacity prior influences such as these may and often do possess over minds a severer argument might fail to impress. May, as a child, had been quick at learning "object-lessons" with Mr. Templeton, a pet method of education. Nor was the habit thus early acquired yet forgotten. No father's voice was heard teaching "object-lessons" to-night—she was no more a child; yet the lesson that now silent teacher would have bid her learn, at this moment was learnt to perfection, got by heart as far as will was concerned, ere she quitted the window; and a determination to drink patiently, nay, more than that, to drink smilingly, one little drop from the cup of trembling the leaves of that tree reminded her had once been drained to its very dregs, and the memory of having been the involuntary instrument of which, still caused its branches thus to quiver, took possession of her soul. No sooner was her resolution finally taken, than the vision of her father once more arose, and his well-remembered words, that last dread night at Haseldyne (last dread night at least for him) sounded distinctly in her ear, "He that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment."

"White raiment!" repeated May. "Yes, father, surely; anything were worth enduring for hope of that white raiment. Why make such to-do on the road towards it? One cannot have two heavens."

She was startled by feeling a hand laid on her shoulder,

and, turning round not a little alarmed, the terror quickly subsided, on beholding little Algernon standing beside the window, his uncovered feet looking white as snow in the moonlight, and tears streaming down his cheeks.

"May, let me stay here and help to watch Rachel," sobbed the child. "Is she better?—I have had such a terrible dream, but not about Rachel. I thought some one was being unkind to you, May, and that woke me, and I jumped up, and came here to see if it was true."

"Silly little boy, to believe in dreams, who told me the other day he never would be so foolish again," said May, folding her arms caressingly round the child, drawing him towards her.

"Yes, I know, May, but I could not help it to-night; seeing Rachel brought home in Mr. Egerton's arms, looking so ill and strange, frightened me. Do let me stay here, May, and watch her while you go to sleep. I am quite big enough to watch sick people, and if she wants anything, I can wake you;—do, dear little May, you look so tired—pray, do."

He looked up coaxingly, and the "dear little May," from Algernon's lips, was at all times, as he well knew, an argument of such unanswerable importance, that to please the child she consented to lie down on a sofa at the foot of Rachel's bed, establishing Algie head-nurse on the chair by the patient's side, wrapping a shawl round his tiny shoulders to prevent the "dear old hospital-nurse from taking a rheumatic fever," as the delighted child whispered into her ear, after imprinting a kiss almost as smothering as if in reality he had been the dear old nurse in question. May had not intended sleeping, but, worn out with watching and excitement, no sooner was her head laid on the sofa, than the resolve, however involuntarily, was scattered to the winds, had there been any at hand to scatter it to.

Disappear somewhere or other the precaution certainly did, and she slept a deep, unbroken slumber, undisturbed by stir or motion, dream or phantasy, for the space of at least three hours. The sun was chanting matins when she woke, and Algernon, sitting where he had been left, eyes wide open, and small head bent towards the curtain, listening intently for the slightest sound; but Rachel had never moved.

"Thank you a thousand times, Algernon, my pet—my faithful old nurse; you have done me so much good, I feel quite strong again now, and ready for a long day's work. Fly off to your nest, my singing-bird, and lay there till I come to pay your night's wages with—you know what, baby-boy—May's sugar-plums, as you call them. Will he always care for such remuneration?" she pondered, as Algernon's tiny figure disappeared in the doorway. "Will a sister's kiss be always thus prized? Ah! little Algie, what would *I* not give to be once more, and for *evermore*, a child!"

Mr. Egerton came early the next morning to inquire after Rachel, and to announce the joyful news of Lord St. Clair's having been declared by the physician past all fear of danger. "His anxiety about Miss Rachel could alone retard his rapid recovery," added Mr. Egerton. "He had inquired repeatedly after her during the course of the night, and had requested Mr. Egerton to obtain from Miss Templeton, personally, a more definite account of the invalid's real state of mind and body than he could otherwise depend upon." Not until long after Mr. Egerton's departure did the object of his inquiries awake, perfectly conscious, though still fevered and languid, but re-invigorated beyond May's, or even Mr. Dalton's, expectations, by her twelve hours' heavy trance—for sleep it could scarcely be called.

"May, dear, have I been dreaming, or is it all true?"

was her first question, in a voice she tried hard to keep from shaking.

"Partly true, and partly not, dearest," was the calm reply. "We have need for deep thankfulness. Lord St. Clair is pronounced out of danger; Mr. Egerton brought the intelligence a few hours back, together with the kindest inquiries after your own health, from St. Clair, whose anxiety about you is the only drawback, Mr. Egerton said, to his own recovery."

The sigh of intense relief with which these words were received, harrowed May's heart almost more than the raving of the preceding night. It told as much of bygone agony as of present joy. * * * *

Rachel recovered but slowly. It was some weeks ere she was considered sufficiently convalescent to be moved down stairs. When this was the case, Mrs. Templeton, not her sister, became chief infirmarian, while Phœbe was installed as day-nurse, and Algernon her proud and able assistant. The cause of this arrangement was easily accounted for by Rachel, and laid entirely to the charge of her musical engagements. Phœbe, however, took occasion to inform her still unchanged and acquiescing friend, that it was mortal queer—she could not make it out no how! How it happened, eight times out of ten, that when his young lordship (her universal name for St. Clair) came to their house nowadays, Miss May was sure to be uncommon busy upstairs, or agoing out on matters of importance, as she called 'em, leaving little Miss Rachel and poor dear misses to amuse him; he didn't look as if he half-liked it, the fine-spirited young gentleman, when she took them their messages into the drawing-room. No, nor was it likely he should! For her part, she thought Miss May might have made a bit more time for him if she'd tried;—she'd always time for everybody else, young or old—but it was

not her business to interfere with her young ladies, not she ! let alone praying for them whenever she got the chance of a quiet moment ! Even a servant, she supposed, might interfere in that way, and no harm come of it. And Phœbe's friend (lucky woman in her friendship, that old Phœbe !) did not contradict her.

CHAPTER XI.

“Take her up tenderly, lift her with care,
Fashion’d so tenderly, young, and so fair.”—HOOD.

RACHEL was returning alone from the four o’clock *Benediction* at St. Mary’s one afternoon (Algernon having gone with Mrs. Markham’s children, *chaperoned* by May, to see Westminster Abbey, and one or two other long-promised sights), when her attention was irresistibly attracted by the sad, plaintive tones of a young beggar-girl beseeching a smartly-dressed woman, who was passing by, to stop for one moment and hear her speak.

“I don’t want money, ma’am, indeed I don’t,” exclaimed the girl, “but I want a friend—I have not one in this great town.”

The lady turned angrily round.

“Then, why don’t you go to the workhouse, I should like to know? That is the proper place for you.”

“I have been, ma’am, but I couldn’t stay; it is like a place of evil spirits. It is awful, indeed it is! I’m bad enough, but oh, I couldn’t live there day after day. Is there no hope for such as me? Is there no place where I can go to regain my good name—where I may learn to love God again?”

“There is sixpence for you,” said the lady, drawing her *moire antique* dress tightly round her; for although a fine afternoon, and the roads well watered, human dirt soiled the pavement; “there is no such place that I know of. If you have lost your character, it’s your own fault. You must go to the workhouse; it’s your only home now, if you

have shut yourself out from the pale of respectable society—and you should be thankful you've got it!"

The lady walked quickly on, and the girl stood quite still for a moment, as if considering; then, dashing the money passionately on the pavement, she threw up her hands into the air, exclaiming bitterly, "God keep you in your silk dresses from like bitterness or agony, here and hereafter! It is not *money* that I need—it's *salvation*!—and I can't get it! She says there's 'no such place!' No place to learn to love God in once more but the *workhouse*, and that awful ward they put me in! She's not the first as have said that to-day—the workhouse—the workhouse! They little know what it is; night and day, the dreadful ward—it was like hell itself! Better death and starvation, than go there again." And she rushed with frantic haste, as though escaping from some imaginary pursuer, down the adjoining street.

Rachel followed her with all the speed her strength could muster; but, withheld by the weakness attendant on her late illness, she could scarcely keep the girl in sight. There was something in that voice, she scarcely knew what, reminding her of past days. Somewhere or other she had heard it before, only not in those agonizing tones. The wider thoroughfare was soon left behind, and then down one narrow street after another did the poor fugitive and her pursuer hasten, both one and the other impelled as if by some hidden impulse they found it impossible to resist. Rachel's breath at length began to fail, and the girl's pace simultaneously to increase.

"Oh, stop her, for pity's sake," cried Rachel, as she passed a roughly-clad but kind-hearted looking labouring man, who, with no small amount of interest, had been for the last minute or two watching the unequal race.

"Holler there, young woman, I say," shouted the man,

putting his hand immediately to his great wide mouth, to increase the sound, "here's a lady a running after ye!—stop there a minit, can't ye, yer silly? There's no pelice here—they never is where they's most wanted!" the latter observation being made in a lower and more jocular tone, as the girl ran on, either not hearing, or certainly not heeding, the call. "Never mind, miss," he added, seeing Rachel's look of disappointment, "there's no thoroughfare up there, so she must e'en come to, whether she likes it or no, a stupid wench; but," said the man, looking keenly at Rachel, and speaking with rude courtesy, "this is not the place for the like of you, miss, I'm thinking—if I may make bold to tell you my mind. Its one of the worst streets this end of town."

Rachel trembled. Her natural timidity, increased by the blow to her nervous system lately sustained, urged an immediate retreat. The hesitation, however, lasted but for a moment, while a conviction of having been specially commissioned to undertake this errand, be the result what it might, inspired her to proceed. Thanking the man, therefore, for his information, and making the sign of the Cross, she walked quickly on.

"That's a good un, anyhow," said the labourer looking after her, "and a pretty one, too. There's not o'er many o' that sort runs in the same curricule nowadays. I'll wait about and see her out of this here place; more's the pity there be such in what they calls a Christian'country. Bless us, if I don't think Christians plays at hide-and-seek in this great town of ours week days, though all the churches seem crammed full enough of them as calls themselves so on Sundays."

Rachel meanwhile had reached the entrance of the wretched court, down which the girl had disappeared, and about which several untidy-looking young women were

idling. Two or three of them burst out laughing when they saw Rachel. Her knees shook under her, but more from fatigue than fear. With an instinctive feeling that woman in her youth, however degraded, will never refuse protection to her fellow-woman when that protection is really sought for, she inquired whether they had seen a young girl run down there a minute or two ago?

"No," answered one of them rudely; "no one had been down there the last half hour or more."

"For shame, Bess!" said another, "what's the good of telling a lie for nothing? There's enough we're forced to tell, without that foolery."

"Gracious goodness, Rhoda!" cried the other derisively, setting her arms akimbo, and leaning against the wall, "why, you'll be turning saint yourself some of these fine days, if you don't mind. No good telling a lie, indeed! Why, where's the good of telling the *truth*, I should like to know? It won't take such as us to heaven, will it? Come, tell us Rhoda, art thee going to turn saint for nothing?"

"Not I," said Rhoda, with a miserable care-for-nothing laugh in return; "I don't know how, if I'd ever such a mind; but I can keep a civil tongue in my head, if I choose, for all that; so no more of your gammon;" and, going up to Rachel, who, pale and frightened, still lingered in the street, she curtsied, respectfully giving the welcome information, that the girl the young lady was in search of, lodged up there, pointing to a broken-down staircase inside a dilapidated dwelling scarcely deserving the name of house, the door of which was standing open."

Rachel ascended, and found herself in a close room, or rather landing, parallel with the staircase. A broken looking-glass, and straw mattress on the ground, covered with a torn, though gaily-coloured counterpane, being the

only furniture. On the mattress lay the object of Rachel's search ; her dirty bonnet thrown aside, and her face hidden beneath the disbevelled hair hanging as a veil around, as if to shield her in mercy (so it seemed to the looker-on) from the gaze of human eye. Rachel did not approach for some moments. Impulse alone (is it always wrong to follow it ?) had urged her onward into this scene of misery ; but having arrived at the wished-for goal, common sense began to suggest that she might as well, perhaps, if not better, have remained at home and spared her tried limbs all this trouble. Of what use was her presence there, now she had come ? There was nothing to be done—nothing at least *she* could do, except to offer a little money, little enough anyhow, for Rachel was poor, and could therefore feel for a more desperate poverty all the more in consequence ; but money had been offered already and passionately rejected. She could not preach either ; that certainly was not her vocation. She needed instruction as much as any one herself, said humility. Rachel had often been accused of indolence by those who, content to criticise character's surface, ignore the possibility of diving beneath it, or, at all events, of finding anything there worth diving for. Rachel, as it happened, was anything but indolent ; no one, perchance, less so, and yet a timidity such as hers, not manfully struggled with, may, as far as helping others is concerned, lead to the same result. In the present instance this was more than likely to have proved true, for, convinced by a train of argument peculiar to herself, that she, poor silly child as she was, could be no sort of use here, and had only made one of her stupid mistakes in following the poor thing at all, Rachel was about to withdraw, determining mentally to procure the name of the court, and then get May, or some one who understood the poor better than she did, to come down there to-morrow ; when the girl, aroused by the sound

of her departing footstep on the staircase, started up from her hard bed, vociferating, "Get along all of you, and don't disturb me, or else, for pity's sake, go and fetch-me a drop of laudanum, or something to put an end to all this misery. I want to die, I tell you; go and fetch it, if you've any heart left among you!"

Rachel shuddered, but did not continue her descent. She was inexpressibly shocked, more, perhaps, than many of our readers living in London, and accustomed, whether they will or no, to hear and read of such-like miseries, as matters, alas! of ordinary occurrence, can believe. Accustomed in her childhood to visit the villagers of Haseldyne in their neat cottages, the very existence of such wretchedness as the one we are relating, was unknown to Rachel. Tremblingly was her footstep arrested. To leave one of God's creatures thus was impossible; vocation or no vocation, use or no use, she must do her part now and try to comfort even should the trial end in despair. Treading softly, she went up to the girl, and bending downwards, her voice nearly choked with agitation, attempted to articulate a few words of consolation. Very simple, but very earnest, were those few brief words, yet were they heard and listened to; a crushed heart being a wonderful listener, and one, moreover, not greatly addicted to criticism.

"Who are you?" said the girl, slightly raising her head from the pillow, but not turning round. "I thought there was but one in the world who could speak like that, and *she—she*"—the head sank despairingly down again—"oh, I shall never, never see her any more, either in this world or in the next! Her last words were, 'Effie, let us try to meet each other by-and-by in heaven.' Heaven! heaven!"—she sprang up and walked to the window—"there's no such place as heaven! No God—no pardon—no blessed absolution! It's all a lie—a

humbug—they told me so, and I am lost for ever!” There was nothing of wildness in the last words. They were spoken calmly, as any one might speak when relating some mournful fact told to them by one in whose veracity they placed full confidence.”

“Effie,” said Rachel, following bravely, and taking her hand—Rachel was strong enough now, the coward spirit had departed for a season,—“Effie, dear child, look at me; don’t you know Miss Rachel? Have you forgotten Haseldyne school, and the church, and the pretty hymns we used to sing together? And papa, have you forgotten papa, Effie, and dear kind Father Paul?”

The girl turned round, and shading her eyes from the blaze of the sun, she gazed at Rachel with a long penetrating wonder-struck look, like one seeking faith in something past human comprehension; and then, with a loud cry of recognition, she sank at Rachel’s feet, staining her dress with her tears. Rachel heeded not the staining; she occupied herself in trying to put Effie’s hair to rights, remembering with a sigh the pride her little pupil’s mother used to take once upon a time in preparing those glossy curls for school; and how fearful mamma used to be, lest Effie, being the only girl in the family, should grow vain from all the care and attention lavished on her appearance; and how, when she had been sent to London as nursemaid to some of the juvenile nobility, who with their parents had been staying at Haseldyne Park, Father Paul had shaken his head, after vainly remonstrating with Mrs. Wood, Effie’s mother, on the subject; and how that mother on her deathbed had wept over her folly in not taking his advice, when, a year after her child’s departure, all communication with her family came to a standstill. She had quitted her situation, and had talked of getting her living by needlework. This was all the information to be obtained from

third parties on the subject, and Effie's last letter, a more than usually affectionate one, had not even alluded to such a proceeding. The mother had died, and that letter, according to her dying request, was laid on her coffin. Nothing had since been heard of the writer, and little matter ; for the father, a hard man, had sworn a terrible oath never to forgive his poor wife's murderer, as he called the lost girl ; she might live and die where she pleased, he never wished to hear her name again ; and her brothers—they were but boys—were commanded, under peril of severe chastisement, never to mention it in his presence.

"Poor thing!" thought Rachel, as these reminiscences returned to mind, "how shall I be able to comfort her?"

She tried once or twice to raise Effie from her crouching position, but in vain ; till at length the girl, as if struck by some sudden recollection, rose of her own accord, and moved away some paces from the box on which Rachel was sitting.

"Oh, Miss Rachel!" she said, still keeping her face buried in her hands. "You must not touch me, I am not fit to be near you—not I : you are too good and innocent for me ; you are one of the blessed pure in heart ; you love God ; I did once—I was among them once ; but now—now—what am I now?"

Rachel began to feel shy, and perplexed again. She wished Father Paul was there, or some one who could say good things ; she did not know how to talk religion, except to little children, such as Effie used to be ; but she was grown up now, taller than herself—what could she say ? How stupid she was ; not a single word could she remember out of any book, the Bible included, wherewith to comfort Effie, who evidently expected some few words of advice or consolation in reply to her last remark. At last, in despair, and quite *un-à-propos* of anything that had yet been said, Rachel asked, drawing the girl towards her,

whether Effie loved her. The answer was not given in dubious terms.

"Well, then, if you love and care to follow my wishes," said Rachel, "get your bonnet, and come home with me, and Miss May will tell us the best thing to be done next."

The girl hesitated.

"You are too kind to me, miss—indeed, you are! I am worse than the rest—worse than any one; for I knew the right road you taught me, and I turned my back upon it, let myself be laughed out of my religion first, and then went from worse to worse. I have broken my poor mother's heart—shall I ever be forgiven?"

"Come along Effie," said Rachel nervously; "it is getting late. Do you think God would have sent me here to fetch you, if He did not mean some good by it? and who ever heard of a Catholic doubting His forgiveness? why, a little child of four years old would teach you better than that."

Effie's face brightened up.

"God bless you, dear lady, for speaking those words, and for taking me away from this place. I would work all night, I would do anything to gain a respectable living, if I knew how to set about it; but no one will employ us poor girls. There's Rhoda, and many of them, would turn if they knew how; though they darn't own it to the rest, or they'd have no peace of their lives. They're not all alike, though people think they are."

She was ready to set out now, having smoothed her hair, and put on a tidier shawl and bonnet than before—relics of happier days, but, owing to their want of finery, by no means approved of in the circles their wearer had lately been moving in. The court inhabitants were still standing where Rachel had left them, awaiting with much curiosity her descent from crazy Bess's room, as they called Effie, who had carefully concealed both her Christian and surname

from their knowledge. Some of them were drinking gin, passing the glass round to each other, while many a terrible word passed their lips, mingled with loud, reckless laughter.

"Hush—hush!" said Rhoda, as Rachel, followed by Effie, reappeared; "don't say such things afore the lady; it's no good frightening her—she looks about scared to death as it is."

"Lor' bless us, Rhoda!" said the girl who had been spokeswoman before, and was now half tipsy, "how you do preach to one! We are only enjoying ourselves a bit: I suppose she does the same, only she's got a fine house to see her friends in, and we haven't. Well, I'll be hanged if she ain't a Catholic; there's a rosary by her side—and crazy Bess is going along with her. Well done, Bess," calling after her, as the two were leaving the court, "you're a knowing one, you hypocrite—going to turn papist for a change, now times is hard. You've got your wits about you when you like."

"Do not answer, Effie," entreated Rachel, as Effie, with scarlet face, slackened her pace, half inclined to turn back, and refute the taunt.

They passed on, but were arrested by a step behind. It was Rhoda's.

"Good-by, Bess," she said kindly; "I'm glad you've got out of it—you're better than the rest of us; but, Bess, whatever you do, don't get yourself among us again;" and without waiting for a reply, she hastened back, as if afraid of her companions' ridicule.

Rachel's rough friend had kept his promise, and was still waiting outside.

"So you've found her, miss," he said, with a good-humoured smile: "So that's all right; and now, with your leave, I'll see you out of this here place, the sooner the better."

He spoke with judgment; neither was his *chaperonage* to

be despised, as Rachel lost not much time in discovering. Street after street, as they returned, was now filling with those whose sole employment appeared to consist in destroying with feverish impetuosity, as though their very existence depended on it, the image of their Creator, not only from their own souls, but from the souls of all around them. Rachel walked on with wonderful steadfastness, for one so timid and easily unnerved; the joy of having Effie by her side compensating in great measure for the suffering of listening to words and expressions more blasphemous than she had believed it possible men, much less women, could pronounce,—making again and again, whenever these reached her ear, the sign at which fiends tremble and hell bows down in anguish. She blessed the great Father, that one at least of His creatures was escaping through her weak instrumentality from “the snare of the hunter and the noisome pestilence.” Many called after her and Effie, saluting their guide with drunken laughter.

“Hilloa, Jack!” cried out not a few, “so you’ve turned polite all of a hurry! Wonders will never cease—you’ve turned beau.”

“Mind your own business,” shouted Jack, “or I’ll soon teach you.” And as Jack looked like a man that could, if he were so inclined, keep his threat with a vengeance, his *protégées* were allowed to pass unmolested. Thankful indeed was Rachel, no less than poor Effie, when at last St. Mary’s appeared in view. They were quite safe now, said Rachel, turning to the man, with a grateful smile, and very many thanks for his assistance. No money could ever repay such kindness, she added, but if he would accept half-a-crown, all her purse had to offer, she, not he, would be the obliged party. The man touched his hat respectfully, but declined receiving any remuneration. He hadn’t done it for money, he had got plenty of work, and plenty of victuals,

thank God. "But there's one favour I'd like to ax ye, miss, if I may make so free," he continued, "and that's for you to say one of them prayers for me now and then, as I seed ye a-putting up in that there precious bedlam outyonder. I've most forgot to say my own sin' I was a boy a' school ; but that bit of a girl there minds me of my poor Mary, who died in the hospital a bit agone. I thought it hard at the time to lose the bonnie lassie ; but I don't no longer now, for I'd rather see her in her cold grave, a hundred times and over, than live, and may-be be like one of them we've just left. God help 'em !—we're all poor weak creatures, and it's a bad world to steer through. I'm glad my Polly is safe out of it, anyhow ;" and he turned away with a tear in his eye, but it was not shed for Polly.

Rachel found May and her little tribe engaged in discussing tea and plumcake, and anxiously expecting her arrival home. Where could she have been? was the general inquiry ; they had been wanting her to play games, and tell stories, or else listen to the wonderful tales first to be related of all that had been seen by the dozen pair of eyes round the tea-table since they left her in the morning.

Great was the whole party's astonishment at hearing Rachel's laughing answer.

"Fancy Miss Rachel losing her way, and having to be brought back by a great, big man in a white smock."

"Not a very white one, I dare say, Master Edwin," said Algernon, who did not altogether like Rachel's being made fun of. He had an immense reverence for "sisters," had Algernon, and thinking Edwin rather daring in his last remark, ventured on a little contradiction, as a balm to his wounded feelings. "Smocks don't keep long white in London, any more than your pinafore, Edwin, when you go digging in the garden ; your nurse says it gets as black as a chimney-sweep's before you've had it on two days."

The laugh was now turned on Edwin, much to Algernon's relief. Boys and girls were fair game for ridicule, but not May or Rachel. Effie, meanwhile, had been comfortably established in the kitchen, with Phœbe, who quickly recognized her as Mrs. Wood's poor lost girl; but, instead of asking a host of questions to begin with, as people, especially a woman of her calibre, are apt to do, when curiosity is in the ascendant, old Phœbe employed the time between Rachel's departure from and return to the kitchen in the more profitable occupation of making tea, and buttering a larger share of hot toast than her guest had either heart or appetite to consume.

May, who had little needed her sister's whispered words of information in becoming aware of something more than usual being in the wind, took an early opportunity of leaving the room, and listening to Effie's tale; while Rachel remained behind to play with the children, who would not hear of doing without their merry playfellow, having once obtained possession of her. It appeared from Effie's account, that the family in whose service she had quitted Haseldyne were people professing no religious principle, and caring little what became of the servants either in town or country, provided their goings-on did not interfere with the comfort and external regularity of the household. The servants were, in consequence, as bad as London servants can be, and that, as we are all unfortunately aware, is not saying little. Effie, being a nice-looking, pleasant-mannered girl, was soon placed in scenes of fearful temptation. She stood fireproof for some considerable time, and continued, whenever an opportunity occurred, to frequent the sacraments. This her fellow-servants, one in particular, were determined to put a stop to; and bitter indeed was the ordeal of ridicule and derision their victim had to pass through ere her resolution of clinging, through thick and

thin to the faith of her childhood and its imperative requirements finally succumbed. This point gained, all else was comparatively easy. Step by step she wandered from the Good Shepherd's fold, and at length deserted it altogether. There was no friend near to help the sinking one, to bid her return at once and not despair. She was dismissed her situation, and advised to seek for needlework, obtaining first a promise from her mistress of silence as to the reason of this proceeding. Had her mother alone been in question, Effie would have sought shelter in her forgiveness; but the remembrance of her father and his habitual severity drove her into concealment. Effie had never learnt dressmaking, and plain work to one who scarcely knew a soul in London soon became starvation. The work-house was the next resource, and poor Effie sought one of proud England's boasted homes for the poor, the sorrowful, the sick, the dying, the lost, and the destitute; the home her loving arms hold open to her aged and her little ones; and without one word of inquiry was immediately put into the same ward, "the terrible ward," as Effie had justly called it, with the most abandoned of her sex. With a heart yet unhardened, and a soul over which the Holy One still brooded sighing for re-entrance, she fled from the "union," and was persuaded by some young girls, Rhoda among them, whose acquaintance she had formed in her search after needlework, to join them in a lodging and try once more to get a living. They would support her till she found some work, and would put her into the way of obtaining it. They did not at first ask, or even hint at asking, her to serve under the banner of the wicked one; and when at last they ventured to propose it, she fled from them, and walked through the streets with aching heart, entreating one passer-by after another to direct her to some place of safety. It was on the evening of this day Rachel met her; with the

sequel of that meeting we are acquainted. The question as to what could be done in the way of a lodging for Effie that night, there being no spare room in their own house, was quickly settled by Phœbe, who at once proposed to let Effie, if missis and the ladies would allow it, share her own bed ; a great act of self-denial on Phœbe's part, she being rather fussy and over-particular in her ways ; but professing a determination, were her proposal rejected, of feeling quite "put out" for the next week to come. The next difficulty was Effie's wardrobe, her present dress being anything but in accordance with Phœbe's rules of servant-like propriety. On this point, however, the old woman said there need be no sort of bother. She would manage it as well as all the haberdashers in London put together, let alone their running up a bill twice the vally their goods was worth, and she making no charge at all. Beckoning Rachel, therefore, with a knowing wink, to accompany her upstairs, Phœbe drew from the depths of an ancient-looking chest, the lid of which formed her oratory, sundry dresses, and other articles of female attire, made, as Rachel afterwards observed, to the amused ears of mamma and Algernon, in the fashion worn during the days of the chronicles of the kings of Juda.

"Ah, Miss Rachel," said Phœbe, holding up with proud admiration one vestment after another, "I'll be bound, by the looks of you, that you're wondering how I came by all these here goods ; but to tell you the truth—only it is a bit of a secret, remember—I was once a-going to get married, like the rest of the lassies ; so of course I goes and buys myself all manner of traps, and a sight of time did I and mother (may she rest in peace) spend making them up.

"Well, Miss Rachel, God knows what's best for us all, don't He ? If marriages ain't made in heaven, they'd best not be made at all."

Rachel gave a sigh of acquiescence.

“ Well, miss, as I was saying, it all came to nothing, and these traps was every one left on my hands, and have lain in that box this many a long year; for I hadn’t the heart to wear them myself, nor yet to give ’em away; besides, the lassies nowadays don’t make much account of such things as these;” and a Noah’s Ark cap was held up to the light. “ I dare say, though, that poor wench down there will be able to alter and shape them about a bit; and I’m sure she’s kindly welcome to the lot, for I am getting into years now, and should have learnt long sin’ not to be hoarding up treasures in this world; they soon gets moth-eaten, least-ways mine always did.” So Effie, nothing loth, was arrayed in Phœbe’s wedding clothes that were to have been; and Effie’s prayer, poor sinful child, will not be wanting for old Phœbe in her hour of need—the hour of the Bridegroom’s coming, and the call for the wedding guests.

The present arrangements, however, could, owing to various circumstances, last but a few days. The Templetons were not able to keep two servants; neither did the director under whose care, at the earliest opportunity, Effie had placed herself, think it advisable her future path should at once be made too easy, which would have been the case had Mrs. Templeton been able to receive the girl into her service altogether. Mr. Hunter would have proposed her admission without delay, had it been possible, into one of the two Catholic penitentiaries near London; but from the number of applicants already promised the ensuing vacancies, and the time that must consequently elapse ere Effie could be received, his advice for the present was, that work sufficient to maintain her should be provided from the church funds, and that a lodging-house, just set on foot, and under the superintendence of a lady residing in his district, should for the time being become her home. Both Rachel and her sister coincided in the arrangement, and accepted

with much pleasure Mr. Hunter's offer of an introduction to the lady above mentioned. The offer, moreover, being made more in the shape of a request than otherwise, owing to the press of business already on Mr. Hunter's hands, decided the young ladies on taking all trouble attendant on Effie's case into their own. The first spare morning, accordingly, they set out together on the proposed expedition, calling at Mr. Hunter's house, on the way, for the letter of introduction.

"How very curious!" exclaimed May, with a smile of pleased surprise, as she pointed out the address to Rachel. "Surely this can be no other than the lady I have so often talked to you about—Mrs. St. Aubyn."

"The name is not a common one, and, besides, the description St. Clair procured for you," said Rachel, laughing,—while the already bright colour on her cheek grew many a tinge brighter as she spoke the words,—"exactly tallies with Mr. Hunter's information—fond of poking into workhouses, &c. &c. I am in a perfect fever to be there," she continued, taking May's arm and hurrying forward, "partly for your sake, of course, May, but in a still greater degree for my own. I am dying to see May's idol, as St. Clair calls the unknown lady—May Templeton, who was never yet found guilty of idol-worship."

She looked up saucily, expecting to meet a smile for her impertinence; but no smile was there, and Rachel's quickly vanished. May's gravity was infectious, and, somehow or other, this morning the gravity would not be shaken off. In due time the sisters arrived at their destination, one of the smaller houses near Belgrave-square. Mrs. St. Aubyn was at home, and though engaged at present, would soon be at leisure, said the servant, ushering the Miss Templetons into a prettily-furnished drawing-room, the walls of which were hung round with sacred prints, and one or two

exquisitely-painted pictures of the immaculate Mother and her Child. One in particular attracted May's admiration. It was painted, she afterwards heard, by Francia, and spoke volumes both for the heart and imagination of the painter. The expression of the Divine Child's face, gazing sadly, and with a wondering look, into the Mother's, as though, in the infant helplessness of incarnate Godhead, he understood—comprehended her not, was in itself as an unfolded leaf of that mystery of mysteries, the incarnation of the Word; while the Virgin's face, telling of the eternal *Magnificat* that from the hour St. Gabriel's Ave broke upon her prayer had been raptured in her heart, repeated that mystery.

This picture was still occupying May's attention as well as Rachel's, when Mrs. St. Aubyn entered the apartment so quietly they did not hear her approach, till, in a soft musical voice, she bade Miss Templeton good morning, apologizing, at the same moment, for having unavoidably kept herself and sister waiting so long. May's prophecy was a correct one; the Mrs. St. Aubyn of the ball-room stood before her; neither, as too often happens, had either distance, or evening costume, or the becoming light of Mrs. Forrester's chandelier, lent the smallest enchantment to May's first view of this lady. Whether in near or far perspective, there was something irresistibly attractive in Mrs. St. Aubyn's calm, grave face. No longer young, or what the world would call beautiful, yet was the unquenched though chastened enthusiasm of her dark earnest eye at once fascinating and lovable. It spoke of once vivid, perchance even passionate impulses, now curbed into the meekness of a little child; of a loving heart, over which the storms of life had indeed swept, but only to leave it more firmly anchored on the rock life's roughest wave lacks power to disturb, and therefore all the more ready to lend a helping hand, when needed, to fellow-voyagers.

May, the last person in the universe, as a general rule, to form either likings or dislikings to any one under a month or two's acquaintance, felt instinctively a confirmation of the feeling first experienced in Mrs. Forrester's room, that she could *love* Mrs. St. Aubyn; and the impression then made, and never after effaced from her memory, proved the germ of an affection which in after-years became one of the most deeply-rooted in her heart—one of those best and holiest friendships, whose purity and sweetness will endure long after the changes of this mortal life shall have brightened into the unchangeable realities of a better and brighter existence.

But Mrs. St. Aubyn has finished Mr. Hunter's letter, and looking up with an expression of much interest, is begging May to relate from beginning to end the particulars of poor Effie's case, adding at the conclusion, that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to receive the young girl among her inmates at St. Joseph's Lodging-house. A vacancy happened, most fortunately, to have occurred the preceding day, and had not yet been filled up. Would the Miss Templetons like to accompany her to the house in question? If so, they might as well set out together, it being her intention to pay a visit there some time or other in the course of the day, and the present hour, did they feel so disposed, was perfectly convenient to her.

The sisters gladly acceded; and on the way Mrs. St. Aubyn explained to them the few simple rules and regulations she had laid down for the general comfort of the poor women who sought shelter at this refuge; the intention of herself, and other ladies who had aided in the formation of the lodging-house, being to provide a respectable home for women, especially young ones, engaged during the daytime in needlework or other occupations.

Each inmate paid a small sum weekly, about the same price, or rather less, than required in other lodging-houses, and for this they received, in addition to their nightly shelter, a daily breakfast. For the rest of their meals each was dependent on her own exertions. Prayers were read night and morning, either by herself or the matron, who took charge of the house during her absence. No one but Catholics was, of course, required to attend ; but all, whether Protestant or Catholic, were obliged, under pain of dismissal, to be at home by a certain hour in the evening, and to observe the general rules of the Refuge, as to order and propriety of conduct.

May and Rachel were both pleased with the house and its arrangements, but still more so with the sweetness and affability of its lady-patroness. Rachel, on reaching home, was even more enthusiastic than Mrs. St. Aubyn's first, but less demonstrative admirer, in singing her praises : so much so, indeed, that Lord St. Clair, whom they found awaiting their return, and having a long chat with Mrs. Templeton over the luncheon-table, declared he was growing positively jealous of this tiresome Mrs. St. Aubyn ; she was running away with all his old friends, and deserved to be challenged by him to deadly combat on Primrose Hill, or some other field of warfare as quiet and unfrequented. St. Clair was in high spirits to-day. He had bought tickets for some private exhibition May had often expressed a wish to gain admission to, and turning to her with one of his old Hazel-dyne smiles, Lord St. Clair offered to escort Rachel and herself thither, on that or the following afternoon. May was pleased and sorry in the same breath—would have liked it extremely, and so would Rachel, had not Mr. Egerton already procured similar tickets, and formed an engagement to accompany them to the exhibition on the following Saturday.

St. Clair bit his lip, and silently replaced the tickets in his pocket. At any other time he would have proposed forming one of the Saturday party, and have declared it all the merrier from having the addition of Frank Egerton's society; but an indefinable something in May's manner forbad this proposal, and St. Clair—at all times over-sensitive of being *de trop*, and, under present circumstances, already predisposed to take alarm—at once repelled the idea.

As to Rachel, she devoutly wished Frank Egerton, and his tickets included, at the moon, or at least a thousand miles off, somewhere or other in their mother earth. Disappointment was a word Rachel at present was little accustomed to meditate upon, and the rebel heart and rebel cheek, though not the rebel tongue (for Rachel, though childlike in manner, was a woman, and knew concealment and silence to be part of her birthright), called it *hard*—yes, very hard, the disappointment of not being able to visit a picture-exhibition with Lord St. Clair, their kindest friend in London; though, of course, Mr. Egerton was very kind, too, and she must not be ungrateful. But then it was not the same thing. Mr. Egerton had not the equal right to be kind to her and May as Lord St. Clair had; and, altogether, it was dreadfully disappointing!

Alas for you by-and-by, poor silly little Rachel! She was a good child, though, and tried hard to enjoy, or to appear to enjoy, the exhibition when Saturday came, and May admired her self-control. To love her little sister more were impossible; but to see her improve, to watch the development of any fresh trait of character, was now a double delight. To see Rachel walk in the road of perfection, whatever her vocation in this world, had ever been a daydream of May's earliest girlhood, but now another's happiness seemed entwined with the aspiration! St. Clair

loved goodness : Rachel must be perfect for his sake, as well as on her own, if God willed her to be his. That He might so will it, had been May's hourly prayer—and when was prayer, if it deserved the name, *ever* left unanswered in the end, though years, ay, ages, may elapse between petition and reply?

So May prayed on, and Rachel loved on, and St. Clair wondered on, and wondered why it was May and he were no longer heart to heart as of yore, and then wondered why he allowed the wonder to exist any longer—why he left the reason to slumber in abeyance another day—another hour—the solution of the mystery being within his own immediate reach ! Let those who have loved—loved as St. Clair loved—answer the question. Let those who have bowed their souls to an earthly idol, and never, till after many a long year of bitter experience, tasted the sweetness of that love which casteth out fear, and to whose suit there is but one reply, account, if they can, for the trembling uncertainty—the preference of doubtful ignorance for possible truth—sealing, from week to week, and month to month, the human lover's slave-bound lips !

CHAPTER XII.

“ My heart is sair—I darena tell,
My heart is sair for somebody !
I could do—what could I not ?—
For the sake o’ somebody ! ”—SCOTCH BALLAD.

A YEAR has passed by since Rachel’s illness, carrying on its wing many an event of greater or less import to all around, our heroine among the number. A change had overshadowed the family hearth since then. Two faces were absent; poverty’s was one of them, for Arthur, in consequence of unlooked-for promotion to a post more lucrative than he had expected to obtain for some time to come, had been enabled to place his family beyond the reach of the tattered monster, so meekly encountered—so joyously bade farewell to when summoned suddenly away.

But another face was also absent—a face that, come joy or grief, poverty or riches, could never again be replaced in this world—a face that, having once withdrawn its smile of loving sympathy in the gladness or tearful submission to the sorrows of her children, had left behind a vacancy, no other, however dear, might ever more fill up. For what smile is like a mother’s?—where, in the wide, dreary earth a love as changeless, as self-forgetful, as enduring, as little dependent upon the gratitude, or the absence of it in those often selfish, unloving natures, on whom it is showered down?—where the love which, like hers, requires no fuel save that drawn from its own exhaustless mine to keep it ever bright and ever burning? Yes, a change had, indeed, passed over the Templetons’ hearth. They had money now, and leisure ;

no concerts to attend, or patient invalid to wait on. Time might even have begun to hang heavily on their hands, a disease so common in their neighbourhood as to be possibly contagious, had not Lord St. Clair's "tiresome Mrs. St. Aubyn" invited the sisters to assist in some of the various charities that lady's unfortunate monomania led her to "poke into"—St. Joseph's house among them. Effie was still there, having conducted herself so much to Mrs. St. Aubyn's satisfaction that she placed her under the matron, in some household capacity. The girl's father had been repeatedly written to, both by Effie herself and Rachel Templeton; and many an earnest appeal had been urged for his forgiveness, but the same answer was always returned; he would have nothing to do with Effie, she might shift for herself, a bad, cruel wench as she'd been. Phœbe's indignation, when his letters were read to her, knew no bounds. "He'd better mind if he didn't have to shift for himself some of these days," she said—"the very idea of God Almighty's being able to forgive us, and our not being able to forgive each other." Effie herself accepted it all, as she told Rachel, for a penance; she'd well deserved a hard one, and she had got it; but if mother forgave her up there in heaven, she could bear it; and unless they have harder hearts up in heaven, thought Rachel, than we're led to suppose, mother must have done that long ago, for never was a truer or more fervent penitent than poor Effie, with her long, badly-spelt letters to Rhoda, and "the rest of 'em," beseeching all to follow her example, and "come out of it;" and her frequent invocations, seldom omitted even in the midst of washing and scrubbing, to our Lady of Compassion on their behalf.

In the beginning of the year we have alluded to, the Templetons had sustained a serious loss in their already limited circle of acquaintances, or rather friends, by the

departure of Mr. Egerton for Australia, in which far distant land, a pretty fair opportunity of climbing the hill to fortune—an opportunity duty, far more than inclination, induced him to close with—had presented itself. Both May and her sister, not forgetting their mother, with whom Mr. Egerton had become, next to St. Clair, second-best favourite, mourned his absence. He had been so truly kind, especially during Mrs. Templeton's illness, continually bringing fruit and flowers, and other little delicacies, so much valued by an invalid, and still more appreciated by the nurses with full hearts and empty pockets, who were not only continually put to a push for what to try next, but were too often, alas! obliged to quash some brilliant suggestion of matronly friend, or well-read cookery book, with the answer, "too expensive." The consciousness of Mr. Egerton's being ill able, except at the cost of some personal self-denial, to afford these said luxuries, anything but detracted, in either of the sisters' opinion, from their value. It is not unlikely, all things considered, that Frank's "fit of mournfulness," as Augusta Cunningham called the two hours' grumbling he bestowed upon her cousinly ears at having to leave England, may have had some little to do with wishing his two lady friends at Hamilton Street farewell. Frank Egerton had no sisters, and the Templetons were girls, whom, as he said, a poor fellow like himself might make sisters of—they didn't look down upon him, as half her set did, because he happened to be as poor as a rat. As to his falling in love, he wondered—begging her pardon for using the word—how she could be such a fool as to be everlastingly preaching to him from that text. If it was either of the Miss Templetons she was always hinting about, and he didn't see who else it could be, there were two or three satisfactory reasons against anything of the kind. In the first place, they were Catholics, and would as soon think of turning Mahomedans as of marrying

any one out of their own church. Secondly, he was not going to change his religion for the sake of any woman, however good or however beautiful, unless he were convinced it was a wrong one—which he was not. Thirdly, he had hardly a sixpence, after handing over a trifle to those fellows at Oxford, to find himself in bread and cheese. Fourthly, he was going out of England; and if he lived, and succeeded in having a few thousands, the chances were, that on his return, ten years hence, herself and every other young lady he had the pleasure of being in love with in England would have married, and got half a dozen brats round them, with not a moment to spare for poor old Egerton, whom they had long ago forgotten; and that therefore, fifthly and lastly, he had determined on making the best of a bad business, and becoming a contented old bachelor—the plague of no one, and a comfort to himself; he therefore trusted Augusta would both applaud his resolution and bring her love essays to a conclusion.

Mr. Egerton took a sorrowful farewell of poor Mrs. Templeton, whose kind face, it needed no oracular assurance, would never again bid him welcome to her home. She wrote to him once or twice from thence after his departure, and then one of her daughters, according to promise, took up the correspondence. Rachel's last letter, giving an account of her mother's deathbed, had concluded with Mrs. Templeton's last message to the exile, namely, that the blessing of the widow and the dying would cheer his banishment, and follow him through life.

Since Mrs. Templeton's death, Lord St. Clair had naturally been a less frequent visitor at Hamilton Street. The reason was an obvious one. Up to that period, no son's or brother's presence could have been more invaluable; not only had the invalid—thanks to his generosity!—daily the best medical advice—the frequent drive when able to

enjoy it—the six weeks' sea-side air, at one time prescribed as advisable—the rarest luxuries imagination could devise, or wealth bestow; but during the last terrible days of suffering, many and many an hour of anxious watch had Lord St. Clair himself passed by the dying-bed, persuading the worn-out nurses meanwhile to take needful rest and sleep, or a breath of fresh air in the adjacent park. He was but taking Arthur's place, said St. Clair, more than once, to Rachel, whose face of despairing wretchedness would have made a colder heart than his ache to look on; Arthur would have done as much for *his* mother had their places been exchanged. His opportunities of offering one word of sympathy to May were few and far between; they were ever received with a grateful smile, but at no time encouraged, and every means taken to prevent their being respooken.

May's chief comfort during this fortnight's agony lay in observing St. Clair's increased tenderness towards her sister, who appeared more and more to hang for support on his every word and look. But when the last sad duties were paid, the funeral over, and his footstep and comforting voice less frequently heard in the house, the full extent of their loss, the loneliness and desolation of every room and every common thing around, now *she* was gone—gone, never to return! never again to be waited on by the little loving hands, as they hung listless by her side—first burst upon Rachel in all its blank reality. A certain degree of excitement, always attendant on sickness and death, added to Rachel's never-abandoned hope of her mother's ultimate recovery, had spurred her on before; but now, as the letters of condolence said, it was "all over," the hopeful spirit, and fragile body along with it, sank together. She would sit the whole day long, spite of May's solicitations, in her mother's bedroom, her head laid upon the same dear pillow mamma's

used to lie upon. Too weary for anything save that quiet rest—too languid for conversation or reading—too unhungry for food—too wretched even for prayer or Church; this was the worst symptom of all, thought May, and she was right. Rachel must indeed be ill, beyond her skill to understand the disease, if even Church had failed to attract; for Rachel's religion, like all else about her character, had ever been a science of love, and that alone. She had never been able to comprehend the meaning of the word obligation, as connected with religion. To her it was all gladness and beauty, joy and delight: full of gaiety and merriment, blithe and light-hearted as a child, religion had never frowned in gloomy anger on her innocence; for when and where indeed does the Catholic Church ever look sternly on her little ones? When doth she aught but strive to moderate their joys, lest an enemy come and sow tares among the bright flowers of their youth, transforming them into sorrows? And when life proceeds and paler flowers spring up around them (for sorrow not caused by sin are but these disguised), more gentle becomes her tenderness, as Rachel will find by-and-by, when the weak body is rested, and the heart has accepted its first hard lesson. She will neither be hurried on the way, nor found fault with on her return. Earthly mothers tarry long and patiently for the wayward child as she lingers by the roadside homewards, and her chiding look on the doorstep is more tender than severe—fit emblem of a Mother yet more tender, upon whose brow, stray from her as we will, is ever written a loving re-welcome.

“Leave the poor child alone,” was wise Mrs. St. Aubyn's advice, on hearing of Rachel's prostration of strength and spirit; “she will come round in time, and be as active as the best of us. Do not force exertion upon her, either physical or mental. Let nature take her course for the present; after a while, a little change of scene will be the

best thing for her. Do you think she would come and spend a week with me? At all events, I will try my influence by-and-by, and don't much anticipate a refusal. Rachel and I are great friends. I would invite you at the same time, but I know you could not leave your little brother, Miss Templeton; and, besides, if you will allow me to say so, it is just as well that your sister should learn sometimes to be independent. She has a very endearing but far too clinging disposition—am I not right?—and it will not do in this world always to lean on others, will it?” Mrs. St Aubyn spoke gravely, and with more sadness than usual. Had she, too, learnt that lesson, thought May, in days gone by, and was her present life of cheerful usefulness the result? If so, it were worth acquiring. Mrs. St. Aubyn had judged rightly as concerned Rachel, with one exception. Long ere her physical energies had become re-established, the mental were rapidly outstripping their companions in the unequal race; work, reading, employment, of any and every kind, were once more eagerly sought after with a sort of craving, little understood save by one, who, with a mother's as well as sister's anxiety and love, now watched over Rachel, powerless to help, but waiting with aching hope the issue of her prayer.

Mrs. St. Aubyn's invitation was, somewhat to May's surprise, who knew her sister's disinclination to leave home unaccompanied by herself, gratefully accepted.

“Mrs. St. Aubyn was so kind,” said Rachel, “and it would be such a nice long walk down to Hamilton Street every day to see dear May, long tiring walks were so pleasant,” whispered the pallid lips; but Mrs. St. Aubyn shook her head, and did not quite agree to it. She thought May might take care of herself for a few days, and she had a great many little matters on her own account, requiring Rachel's kind assistance

to set on foot; several young friends also to introduce her to, besides a variety of country calls within driving distance, purposely deferred until Rachel's arrival. Those pale cheeks must begin to gather roses again—the best bouquet in the world to present May and Algernon with on her return home. No, no; long tiring walks should be a future consideration, decided Mrs. St. Aubyn, with a smile so like her dead mother's, that Rachel, her face hidden on Mrs. St. Aubyn's shoulder, promising obedience to every command, set out cheerfully on her Belgravian visit.

Saddened, indeed, must have been the spirit, and broken the heart, that a week spent in Mrs. St. Aubyn's society would not tend to invigorate, and Rachel's heart was not a broken one. Hearts, after all, are tougher commodities than poets would have us believe, and upon the whole, we are inclined to think, quite capable of standing a considerably larger amount of wear and tear than any three, or even six, volume novels would have space to tell of. Seventeen, at all events, is not the age at which they usually "close business;" they only dissolve partnership with all sublunary things till wiser thoughts suggest the possibility of still finding something to do in the great big world, either for themselves or other people; perhaps a little mixture of the two. Besides, Rachel's at present was a hopeful heart, at times a very hopeful one, though mamma was gone, hidden for a little while, and St. Clair so often absent; but then he could not help it. Society's rules *must* be kept; she knew that too well, although they had never pressed thus hard upon her before. He was quite right to be particular, and yet it did seem to her sometimes as if the line was drawn a trifle more tightly than need be. It was such misery to pass days and days together without seeing him, and notes inquiring after their health, &c., were not the same as

visits. She felt nearly choked every time a double knock was heard at the door, or even when the hall-bell rang. Sometimes he used only to *ring* the bell for fear of disturbing that dear mother he had loved so well, and he might not yet have lost the habit. If she only knew when to expect him, and when *not*, it would be far easier to bear. Suspense—this daily cruel suspense—was worse than anything, worse than sorrow—worse, even—yes, worse than death was this word suspense; she wished there were none such in the world, and that people knew at once what would happen to them, either good or bad—resignation and peace went along with the word death, terrible as it was, but suspense, uncertainty, how could they walk hand in hand with peace? This was one, perhaps the main, reason of her ready acceptance of Mrs. St. Aubyn's invitation; This lady not being personally acquainted with Lord St. Clair, and at whose house, therefore, suspense—this hourly suspense, at least, of seeing or not seeing him—would cease to torment. The not being able, either, to tell May what pain St. Clair's absence cost her was another cause of suffering to Rachel, and yet somehow she *could not* tell her. May, with whom she used to share every thought and feeling, how strange it seemed she could no longer talk to her as she once did about St. Clair. It made her very head ache to hear his name mentioned, and for no reason whatever, she felt inclined to give an irritable reply when spoken to about him. What could have come to her? She was growing cross, unkind, unsympathizing, deceitful. Poor child! how bitterly was the self-accusation repeated over and over again in the heart's daily examination, and yet how little cause appeared to exist for its truth. Rachel had never been allowed to read novel or love-tale—Mr. Templeton having expressed a wish to the contrary, as regarded his daughters, until a year or two beyond the age at which

she had yet arrived. This was unfortunate in one way ; a novel, a high-toned one at least, being not unfrequently as useful a friend in helping a girl through her first heart-troubles as any other. Childish and ignorant, she must else too often struggle through them alone ; for across every girl's heart, however youthful, is erected a barrier no hand, not even that of mother or trusted sister, may venture to intrude beyond, unconsciously, perhaps, to herself ; yet it is there erected, only waiting for the word Love to close it stealthily downwards. Happier those who, at Rachel's age, with a child's weak heart and a woman's power of affection, have not yet learnt of its existence.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Know how divine a thing it is
To suffer—and be strong.”—LONGFELLOW.

THE Wednesday following Rachel's departure to Belgravia, at the conclusion of the preceding week, as May was sitting at needlework in the drawing-room, putting the finishing stitch to an antependium she was embroidering for St. Mary's Church, and rejoicing in the news that morning received from Mrs. St. Aubyn, of Rachel's having promised to spend another week with her, and of her guest's having already improved in spirits and appearance, two letters were put into her hand by Algernon, the in-doors postman of the family, who, having fulfilled his mission, flew down again to join Edwin and Edith Markham, and their nursery-governess, who were waiting outside, for their afternoon's promenade, to hear the band in Kensington Gardens.

“ St. Clair's handwriting ! ” exclaimed May, opening it the first, and scarcely glancing at the other letter left by Algernon. “ What can he have to say ? Ah ! must it indeed be so ? ”—as the few brief words within answered her question—“ and after all I have have gone through to spare him this—the heart-breaking, the daily toil, work, suffering, endurance—vain, profitless struggles, like the rest ! ” and with an expression of hopeless despondency, strangely at variance with the heroism of former days, May laid her head wearily on the table before her, and wept—wept passionately—wept as they alone can weep who, having suffered long and silently, seldom, even in secret,

thus find, or even seek, relief in tears. The last year's pent-up agony would at length find vent, tyrannizing in its sudden victory over the wondrous strength which hidden suffering, patiently endured, must sooner or later bring to all, but now physically, no less than mentally, exhausted. May at length ceased to weep, and desiring Phœbe to deny her to all callers, on the plea of headache, lay down for a few moments' repose—no, not repose, but thought.

“Papa—what would he have said to such childish weakness?” was the first reproach. “White raiment, indeed! The overcomers, not the overcome, shall be thus clothed; and yet, what can I do? Give St. Clair a private interview, according to his request, I cannot. Tell him in so many words we are henceforth but friends—dear friends, if he will let it be so—but nothing beyond, is something more than simply impossible. Ah! why has not my conduct disgusted and wearied him out long ago? Have I not prayed, prayed earnestly, that so it might be? I cannot endure him to undergo the pain and humiliation of an absolute refusal—anything save that! And yet my present course is clear—not to accept happiness at the sacrifice of my little Rachel's: never! oh, never! The rougher the pathway, the more cowardice to shrink back! To see him, nevertheless, is impossible. I have neither the strength nor the courage!”

Laying St. Clair's note aside, she drew the other letter towards her, and quite mechanically, without even glancing at the direction, broke the seal. Frank Egerton was the writer. His subject? To many a girl less gifted with tenderness for others, and endowed, at the same time, with an equally keen sense of the ridiculous as was May, the coincidence might have afforded momentary ground for amusement rather than the feeling of almost despairing unhappiness—under influence of which the last-opened

letter was returned to the reader's workbox, its original destination. "Some people in this world appear destined, whether they will or not, to inflict pain on others," groaned poor May, stooping heavily forward, as though the attempt to sit upright were overpowering. "Frank Egerton too, of all people! 'our mother's favourite and little Rachel's adorer,' as St. Clair, never at a loss for a joke, used to tease her by suggesting him to be. How full of contradictions does everything in this world appear! Well! well! had matters turned out differently, where would have been the Cross? And, oh, Arthur! I well know your answer—where the Crown? These letters must be answered, however—the sooner the better;" and suiting thought to action, by seating herself at the *escritoire*, May drew pen and paper towards her. "If I had but some definite excuse—some good, tangible reason to take refuge in," was the uppermost idea, among a thousand others, as, from time to time tearing up first one and then another sheet of paper on which a few blotted sentences were inscribed, she more than once laid aside her intention—her first intention, the one now most at heart—of adopting towards St. Clair, in this one sad letter, at all events, if never more, the affectionate and sisterly tone of days long passed away. The attempt grew more and more hopeless, as each succeeding trial proved. Her letter must be a formal one; she had no excuse to plead. And now the tempter, only waiting his opportunity, and arrayed in suitable apparel—that of self-sacrifice and purity of intention—approached the desponding one: nor were words of subtle temptation long absent from her ear. She had pined for an excuse to offer St. Clair. Why so? One lay ready at her door. For a tangible motive, none better could be found. He pointed towards Frank Egerton's letter—but she understood not the suggestion. He pointed again: the letter was re-

opened, its contents re-perused. Again—and she shrank back in dismay—he bade her complete the sacrifice, not pause half-way; lay her hope of Rachel's future happiness on a more secure foundation than a simple refusal would involve—leave St. Clair no loophole to imagine her refusal an insincere one—or, worse than all, to guess the truth!—and clasping her hands, the next suggestion was instantly listened for. Whispered in bolder accent, decorated in colours not of this world, it sped onward. Promote, by the sacrifice of personal inclination, the total annihilation of self, God's greater glory! Accept that offer, however repugnant to present feeling. Devote her life's remaining, though not first or best, affections to one who, but lately a convert to the faith—that faith more precious to her than life's most cherished prospects—might, perchance, in an hour of lonely disappointment, of unforeseen temptation, with no voice near to counsel or uphold—fall backward! Finally, offer up the holocaust—could there well be one less self-tainted?—at the feet of her best-beloved, the Sufferer of Mount Calvary,—and offer it quickly, there was little time to lose: delay in matters of duty was dangerous, and the one now before her imperative—magnificently imperative. Self, if she lingered to hearken, would say “No.” Her besetting fault too—let not that be forgotten—the one most difficult to combat, was it not procrastination?—a readiness to obey in the end, after deferring obedience to the latest moment? Besides, in this case, reflection was impossible; “God had willed the sacrifice—was not that enough?” The last words seemed as though spoken out aloud. May's soul became dazzled! Her mental vision obscured, and the tempter smiled. His work bid fair to win success; delay, in fact, he scarcely feared. The suggestion, if obeyed at all, must be obeyed at once. St. Clair's reply be the sequel to Frank Eger-

ton's—both sequel and excuse.....Engaged to another! She gazed on the paper before her, and imagined the words written there—St. Clair's eye fixed upon them! The agony for *him* would, indeed, be softened by the perusal. Unmitigated heartlessness from the woman in whose affection he had trusted from childhood would be, even in his opinion, —not an over-ready one in pronouncing harsh judgment—a speedy cure for love! Engaged to *another*! And what of that other? Would *his* future happiness then be thus undoubtedly secured? Dare *she*, under the circumstances, venture to make herself its arbitress? The answer was again at hand. She *might*; on that point, at least, no scruple need be urged. He loved her!—had loved her long, though never before at liberty to make the declaration—was alone in the world, and would now, on account of his new faith, be more especially so. May had heard of converts' trials from St. Clair, though her own life, happily, had been spared them. She had heard of the estranged friendships, the relinquished correspondence, the cold look, the general “not at home;” the requests from once professors of something more than common attachments, as to no further communications, whether written or verbal. The accusations of deterioration of character lodged on the slightest pretext against the once all but faultless individual, now discovered, lo and behold! to have become endowed—thanks to the Catholic religion! nothing else!—with more than the usual allowance of infirmity flesh is heir to. Would Egerton's philosophy, his quick sense of justice and natural affectionateness of character stand the trial? At all events, would not a wife's sympathy and support make it a less dangerous one, and her gentle care for his happiness stand in the place of what she could *not* offer—a devoted love? Of course it *would*, was the answer, as once more the tempter bid her hasten. The case was too clear

a one; she had put her hand to the plough—it were sin to look back. The drawer of the writing-table was opened, a sheet of foreign paper taken out. Wait a moment, tempter! Thou shalt see it written, and thy work—glorious news for thee—completed! But tarry a moment first!

May rose from her seat, and crossed the room towards the mantleshef. A portrait hung there. The portrait of her best-beloved—but not St. Clair's, reader. Little time to spare, vociferated the busy voice. Another half-hour, and the letter reaches not St. Clair to-day. A night's torturing suspense to be followed by such a morning's certainty were too bitter a cruelty. Little time to lose! True, but prayer travels quickly. St. Clair's letter will yet be answered, and be none the worse for waiting. More swiftly than telegrams over land and ocean May's prayer ascended. The words, if words there were (prayer needs them not at all times), never afterwards returned to her memory. Dazzled and confused, their intention alone remained to her; but the answer was no dubious one, and all doubtfulness laid to rest, as she felt (so far, at least, as human heart may dare to judge its Maker's voice) her sacrifice accepted! Its possibly, nay, we will venture to say positively, mistaken, though most pure, intention had yet to be proved by the Refiner! No other way of dealing with the present or future suffering was held before her eye.

The tempter marvelled, and then drew nigh. The answer to her prayer—oh, strange anomaly!—had been in accordance with the last hour's temptation. Why, then, as the girl turned away from the painting, her head bowed down, and hands still clasped in mute submission, fled he shudderingly from the room? Had that brief prayer undone his long hour's mischief?—hurled his threefold temptation to the ground? Had the presumption, self-

confidence, want of submission to see Rachel suffer, and determination at any risk, even by crossing a Higher Will, to procure for her an opposite fate—the sins so artfully presented to his would-be victim—had they by that single act of resignation been thus ruthlessly dispersed?

Algernon returned from Kensington Gardens just in time to post May's two letters. "How soon she had answered them," said Algernon; he wished he could write as quickly. The man who handed him the foreign stamp at the post-office congratulated the little boy on his being just in time with his Australian letter. It was a very near touch, though, he must tell him, the bag for Australia being almost made up. When Algernon again reached home, he found May had gone to bed with a sick headache, no slight disappointment to the little chorister, who had reckoned on practising next Sunday's mass with her for at least two hours. The disappointment, however, was quickly merged in the thought of May's headache; and running down into the kitchen, Algernon, aided by Phœbe, concocted a cup of tea, strong enough to have frightened a homœopathist out of his senses, and carried it up stairs without spilling a drop, greatly to Phœbe's admiration, who declared him to be, without exception, the carefulest, quietest child in a sick-room she ever came across, though he made noise enough, to be sure, he and Master Markham together, at other times. May would neither drink the tea or be hushed to sleep, though she promised to keep the one by her side till by-and-by, and tried hard to accomplish the other. "It was enough to do one's heart good," said Phœbe, "to see Master Algernon trying to lullaby his sister off with those pretty songs of his, and to see Miss May lying so still and death-like there upon his bosom. It was most as good as a picture, and would have done for Miss Rachel to paint off for his lordship, who was always so partial to her drawings, and such

like, and used to spend such a sight of time over teaching her, when Missis—God rest her dear soul!—was alive. Things was changed now, poor young ladies, sadly changed. Well, well, it is a queer world,” sighed Phœbe; but whether the world was a queer one because Missis was no longer in it, or Miss May had a headache and wouldn’t go to sleep, or for some other unexpressed reason, it would be difficult to say. So much for Phœbe’s opinion; now for our reader’s.

Had May acted precipitately? Let her appear in Court.

“Prisoner at the bar, Guilty or Not Guilty?”

Prisoner, in a clear, firm voice: “Not Guilty, my lord.”

Counsel for defendant: “Prisoner never acted with more deliberation.”

Opposite Counsel: “It cannot be proved. Facts speak for themselves.”

Judge sums up the evidence.

“Gentlemen and ladies of the Jury, we refer the case to your decision, and strongly recommend the prisoner to your mercy.”

CHAPTER XIV.

" Oh, shatter'd idols, framed of fragile glass,
We thought were jewels !
Yet the day may come when every fragment
That lies shatter'd now
May turn to sapphires in the Land of Rest.
We raise a palace through a waste of years,
And think its walls are crystal in the sun
Of this world's glory—flashing for an hour.
We look again, and see it was but ice
Which we have dwelt in—thawing fast away
At every burning grasp, it melts the more.
Blessed be he who leaves the treacherous hope,
And into heavenly crystal turns the thaw."—MUNRO.

LORD ST. CLAIRE returned home late that evening from a political dinner-party. His first act was to search, with hurried anxiety, among the heap of letters and newspapers awaiting his arrival, for one evidently of more immediate interest to him than the rest. The sought-for one, however, was not on the table, to judge from the seeker's look of impatience as he rang the bell with more violence than usual, and inquired if no other letters except those before him had arrived that evening. The servant hesitated, first answered in the negative, and then, as if struck by a sudden memory, acknowledged the last post had not been attended to; he would go below and look in the letter-box, but was forestalled by his master, who, having secured, in half the time it would have taken Mr. Henry the footman, the one insignificant-looking note contained in the box, remounted the stairs three at a time, despatching Henry to bed on the way, closed and bolted the door to avoid any

possible interruption, and then, and not till then, first pressing it to his lips, tore the envelope open. The gas with which the room was lighted had apparently been turned on too full for Lord St. Clair's eyes, as, after the first perusal, he rubbed them and lowered the gasometer.

It was not till after a second and lingering reperusal of every separate word that he appeared fully to have grasped or realized their true meaning; and then, with an expression of mingled anger, astonishment, and suffering, he cast the letter to the ground. A silence of some minutes succeeded, the only sound audible being the ticking of a small, prettily-ornamented German clock on the mantleshef, as the pendulum swung musically to and fro in the silence. This clock had been a Christmas gift from May and Rachel some five or six years since, and had been, at home and abroad, a constant companion of Lord St. Clair's from that day. Had its gentle, but—in the silence of the midnight hour—more distinctly-heard vibration anything to do with the fit of passionate anger under the influence of which the young nobleman at last arose and paced the room? Naturally impetuous, to a degree that, if left to his own unchecked impulses, would have probably at times have goaded him on into acts of madness, St. Clair had bent the whole power of his strong, almost indomitable will, to overcome this temptation, and had, in great measure, succeeded. Nature, however, in the present instance, bid fair to have her own way, and spite of every other consideration to assert her omnipotence; he did not speak for some time, but a desperate struggle was passing within. Once he threw the window open, as if oppressed for want of air, and gazed out into the dark night. It was raining fast, but of that he took no heed. The coolness was refreshing. Besides, angry lovers, of all times and ages, having the credit of preferring disagreeable weather to fine, St. Clair's taste at that moment

was not singular. Half an hour and more elapsed, and the window was again closed; the discarded epistle taken up from the floor, re-read for the last time, and then laid quietly on the table. "She is heartless, utterly and wonderfully heartless, like the rest of them," were the accompanying words; but the tone now partook more of sorrow than indignation. "All women are alike—more fickle, more changeable than an April breeze. The world tried to teach me the lesson long ago, but *she* saved me from believing it. I thought her all that was 'most noble, most glorious, as well as most beautiful, in woman. I have worshipped the very ground her footstep touched for years past—yes, ever since I was capable of loving any one—and she *knew* it. Yes," he exclaimed, with newly-awakened passion, "she knew it, she could not help but know it; and now, without one word of remorse, she dashes my long-cherished hopes to the ground—talks of a sister's affection, of a friend's gratitude, of continued intercourse, for the sake of those who are gone, no less than for Rachel's and Algernon's, who may remain ignorant of this unfortunate business, and who have suffered enough already from the loss of what they best love without adding to their trials by causing any estrangement between us. Folly and heartlessness! what does she take me for?—every one's feelings consulted except those she has most barbarously outraged. Friend's gratitude, indeed!—friend's humbug! As if gratitude and friendship had any voice in the matter! Pretty sentimental terms, so often used by women to throw a gloss over their deception and want of feeling! What right, I say, had she to trifle with me in this unwarrantable manner?" continued the young man. "Why keep me, month after month, in this horrible suspense, merely to gratify her vanity and prolong my suffering, when a few words—words she purposely avoided ever giving me an opportunity of speaking—

would long ago have elicited the true state of her feelings, and explained the misunderstanding which, through no fault of mine, had arisen between us? I see through it now—the meaning of her reserve, her changed manner, her dislike to being questioned; but why shrink from acknowledging it before? I could have borne the separation. I could even have borne to see her the wife of another man, and could have gone away praying for her happiness. I could have borne anything but this utter heartlessness. Flattery and admiration have spoilt her, as it spoils them all. I thought her proof against it at one time, but am wofully deceived.” He went on, as if to speak his words aloud were a relief, nay, almost a necessity. “It would have been more excusable in Rachel. Sweet and affectionate as she is, there exists a weakness and instability of purpose in her character, poor child, which might deter a wise man perhaps from risking his whole life’s happiness on her unchangeableness; but May is naturally so different—as firm in judgment as unswerving in principle. Her conduct is altogether inexcusable—that is the worst part of the load given me to endure. No power on earth should have made me believe her false, did not that wretched note mock me with the miserable intelligence. It shall possess that power no longer, however,”—saying which, St. Clair seized May’s letter and held it over the candle, blowing the blackened fragments from him till, in every direction, they fell scattered about the room. Farewell, May, they seemed to murmur, and farewell for ever to St. Clair’s faith in woman’s truth and love. “Now for business and hard work—the only real things in life,” said the young nobleman, opening, one after another, the despatches around him. Some were begging letters from poor people, many of whom Lord St. Clair was in the habit of befriending. Others contained words of earnest thanks for what had already been done towards helping them out

of difficulty, and were written with the sole intention of calling down blessings equally simple and fervent upon his head. Several were merely invitations to evening parties; and one or two asked the advice and friendly counsel never refused, as the writers well knew, by one upon whose judgment, at once clear and straightforward, men farther advanced in life by many a year than himself were glad enough to place reliance. The last paper opened was an official-looking document from the Secretary of State for the Foreign Department. "How curiously," thought Lord St. Clair, glancing his eye along the page, "does circumstance stand unbidden friend sometimes in hour of need, and lend her helping hand out of the hardest perplexity; or rather how lovingly, for who may doubt the special Providence overruling every, even the smallest, accident of our daily life! Two hours ago and the proposal would have been laid aside. Now it is as gratefully accepted. To remain for the present in England is impossible, and to go abroad merely in search of forgetfulness equally hard work; certainly no request than the one before me could at the moment be more opportune."

Having answered the letter in question, St. Clair, instead of retiring to rest, sat up writing several others, besides replying without exception to the budget already on hand. It was daybreak ere the work was concluded, but sleep was still absent from the writer's eyelids. He read for an hour or so, and then set off, as customary, to the seven o'clock Mass at the nearest church to his apartments, a distance of about two miles. It was the church Mrs. St. Aubyn was in the habit of attending, and Rachel and herself happened to be there earlier than usual this morning—eight o'clock, their general hour, was disarranged to-day on account of a long country expedition before them—a pic-nic, in fact, to which Rachel had been looking forward with immense delight.

She always felt in the country like a captive bird set free, more especially since the bird had been caged, body and spirit, up in London. St. Clair, on leaving church, met Mrs. St. Aubyn and Rachel face to face in the door-way, where they were standing, talking to a tribe of school-children. He started, and so did Rachel; but immediately resuming her self-possession (for in his presence Rachel was always self-possessed and happy, the one feeling following with her, as an invariable consequence, the other), she introduced Mrs. St. Aubyn.

St. Clair, spite of himself and his last night's agony, could scarcely forbear smiling at his formidable "lady rival"—so Mrs. St. Aubyn had, in mock jealousy, become nicknamed in Hamilton Street—at length standing before him, arrayed, as usual, in the mingled grey-black and violet colour he and Mr. Egerton had often teased May into describing, and never afterwards left alone, declaring such a costume must make her incomparable Mrs. St. Aubyn resemble nothing so much as Lent church-hangings set in motion. The recollection of May's pretended anger at this impertinence caused the smile. Another moment, and that bright memory was exchanged for a pang of agony as St. Clair remembered their playful *badinage* was for ever past—May and he were henceforth strangers, or worse than strangers. Once true and faithful friends, now separated—separated, not by distance or misfortune, not by captivity or death, but by his unhappy love and her yet more unhappy fickleness—he would no longer give her conduct a harsher name. The hard words of the preceding night had been recalled during the course of the last half-hour's service. In that church and before the altar, those harsh words had been recalled—more than recalled—they had been repented of—and why? Because on that altar the Man of Sorrows—the Friend deserted—the

Friend betrayed—the Friend falsely kissed—the Friend thrice denied—the heart-broken—heart-riven—heart-pierced One had been held up for the imitation as well as adoration of His people, and what heart of man can look on Him and not forgive? During the commencement of the Mass, St. Clair, wrapt up in his own bitter thoughts, had stood or knelt with the rest of the congregation, following the action of the celebrant mechanically—more as a gloomy spectator than one individually interested in the mystery of love about to be enacted; but when the priest, turning to the people with the sacred Host, pronounced, in tones distinctly low, the words—never in St. Clair's ear had they sounded so thrillingly before—“*Ecce Agnus Dei; Ecce qui tollis peccata mundi*”—he had bowed his head in sorrowful humility, the bitterness of his soul departed; the life-sorrow was taken home to his bosom. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us,” continued the priest. Then May must be forgiven fully and for ever, and the pardon was accorded, signed, sealed, and registered in the presence of earth's Absolver—at the feet of the Crucified—nor was it ever again withdrawn; for though the heart ceased not to ache, or the tempter to whisper imprecation on her falsehood, yet no thought of anger or bitterness, however artfully suggested, was ever again permitted to linger in the soul which thus had forgiven. Let those to whom the words “wounded spirit” is an unreality—they whose life's glad sunshine hath never, at one unlooked-for blow, been transformed into darkness—they who dare contradict the poet's assertion, and affirm that “the writhings of a wounded heart” are NOT “fiercer than a foe-man's dart”—call St. Clair's act, if they will, an unheroic one. Well for them if never called upon to imitate its, to them, valueless self-surrender!

May was *not* waiting outside the church, summoned

thither by some miraculous intimation to unsay her words, though Rachel, the unconscious cause of all his suffering, met St. Clair in the porchway; neither did the next post bring a letter from his lady-love, softening the severity of her refusal; neither was little Algernon, with his angel face, permitted to convey the refreshing news (lovers will understand, and excuse our calling it so) of May's last night's terrible headache, or this morning's faded cheek—he might have added faded heart, only Algernon could not have told of what to him was more incomprehensible than a page of the Latin 'Grammar he had commenced learning "this half," and thought "plaguey difficult." None of these were at hand, and yet St. Clair's reward—the only one we have any certainty of obtaining here, and having obtained which, we need not trouble greatly about any other—was not far distant; for as the canon drew towards conclusion, and the words "*Pax ✠ Domini ✠ sit semper vobiscum,*" resounded through aisle and chancel, the promise given at the celebration of the first Mass in the upper chamber at Jerusalem was fulfilled; and though along with the promise came the accompanying prophecy, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," yet did the penalty appear, for that moment at least, little in comparison with the peace—serene, unbroken peace (in comparison with which, what before had been called happiness appeared like the dissolving view of some child's panorama) descending into that crushed heart, and nerving it for battle. A hard one had yet to be fought, and many a rough pang yet to be endured, as St. Clair found when Rachel and her companion met him in the doorway as before related.

To enter into conversation was, he felt, at that moment an impossibility; neither was it necessary. Mrs. St. Aubyn, being an entire stranger, did not of course expect it; and as to Rachel, the few kind words of inquiry after her health,

ton's—both sequel and excuse.....Engaged to another! She gazed on the paper before her, and imagined the words written there—St. Clair's eye fixed upon them! The agony for *him* would, indeed, be softened by the perusal. Unmitigated heartlessness from the woman in whose affection he had trusted from childhood would be, even in his opinion,—not an over-ready one in pronouncing harsh judgment—a speedy cure for love! Engaged to *another*! And what of that other? Would *his* future happiness then be thus undoubtedly secured? Dare she, under the circumstances, venture to make herself its arbitress? The answer was again at hand. She *might*; on that point, at least, no scruple need be urged. He loved her!—had loved her long, though never before at liberty to make the declaration—was alone in the world, and would now, on account of his new faith, be more especially so. May had heard of converts' trials from St. Clair, though her own life, happily, had been spared them. She had heard of the estranged friendships, the relinquished correspondence, the cold look, the general “not at home;” the requests from once professors of something more than common attachments, as to no further communications, whether written or verbal. The accusations of deterioration of character lodged on the slightest pretext against the once all but faultless individual, now discovered, lo and behold! to have become endowed—thanks to the Catholic religion! nothing else!—with more than the usual allowance of infirmity flesh is heir to. Would Egerton's philosophy, his quick sense of justice and natural affectionateness of character stand the trial? At all events, would not a wife's sympathy and support make it a less dangerous one, and her gentle care for his happiness stand in the place of what she could *not* offer—a devoted love? Of course it *would*, was the answer, as once more the tempter bid her hasten. The case was too clear

been afforded. Good-bye to anything like rest at Mrs. St. Aubyn's house if the uncertainty of St. Clair's appearance or non-appearance there were to form part of her morning meditation during the remainder of her visit. She might as well have been at home, and far better, for darling May was accustomed to her little silly nervous way, and never took any notice if she started, or screamed, or jumped up and flew to the window, like a startled butterfly, when any one came to the door. May always went on working, or reading, or singing some of her beautiful songs, and took no notice, which was so pleasant. And then, somehow or other, it always happened soon after one of those bitter disappointments—though May did not know they were disappointments (she thought it was only nervousness)—yet, some way or other, it always came to pass a few minutes afterwards, just after Rachel had time to recover herself, May was certain to come fondling up to her, kneeling down and twisting her hair in and out of her small white fingers, and kissing her again and again, as though there were nothing in the wide world she loved so well. Ah, yes! Rachel did not believe there was any one in the world May loved so well, except Algie and Arthur, and they were boys. She was May's only little sister. Sometimes dear May would begin a song or hymn, the very one most soothing to poor Rachel's feelings at the time—so curious, when they were all unknown to her sister. And why were they unknown to May, those wretched feelings? Ah, Rachel! then came the question—the unanswerable question—why could she not tell May how wretched, how dreary-hearted her life was becoming, what a burden lay on her spirit when St. Clair was absent? It was no sin. Why be afraid of avowing her innocent suffering? Did Rachel know why, or was the question a mystery to herself?—partly yes and partly no; for Rachel was no great reasoner, and,

as we before remarked, the oft-told tale of love, its joys, its sorrows and trials, had never reached her ear as a reality, till in capricious wilfulness, and as if to reprove her ignorance, she found herself singled out as a somewhat premature victim. Neither was Rachel inclined for a process of mental dissection by help of which a woman with more strength of character would have met and understood her difficulties. On the other hand Rachel had enough natural heart-discernment to be alive, vividly alive, to the fact of St. Clair being more to her than any human being—man, woman, or child—mamma and papa included—had ever before or could ever be hereafter. That she in return was reciprocally precious to her childhood's companion, her girlhood's protecting friend had become more an undefined impression of the fancy—a settled though unexpressed hope, and therefore dream of the imagination—than aught beside. That St. Clair loved her—loved her tenderly, as one of the most endearing and most beautiful of little sister pets—was no less true than apparent. That between his affection for her and May lay (especially of late) a marked distinction, and that this distinction, to all outward intents and purposes, weighed the balance immeasurably in Rachel's favour it needed no wizard's eye to discover, though the said magician's eye would probably, unlike Rachel's, have peered beyond the shadowy veil of outward bearing and have read the true interpretation of his affection. Yet herein, alas! lay her mistake, her weakness, and her shipwreck.

But to speak, to tell of that weakness. No, that were indeed a strange impossibility. A voice within, a voice we seldom disobey, forbade it. There were but two to whom she might speak out her heart's deep pain without increasing its suffering—two beside her God, and they lay among the dead. We can always speak to *them*; we fear

not to whisper out our most harrowing secret into the quiet ear of our dead ; and their reply is ever an alluring one. It stimulates to exertion by assurance of repose. Their life's little day, toilsome perchance and stormy, has found its evening. So will ours ; to-night's sun-setting neared the hour. The labourer works blithely, and carols joyously the while, when he thinks of home and nightfall—his father's welcome and mother's smile. With these or such-like thoughts did the voices of her dead whisper around her when in less hopeful hours, or when May was absent, and no living one near to caress or sympathize, Rachel sought their still company, returning to the routine of every-day duties afterwards, if not with a brighter cheek yet with a wiser heart.

But Belgrave Street appears in view, and Mrs. St. Aubyn, putting her hand on Rachel's shoulder, is expressing much regret at having allowed her little friend to rise so early this morning. She looks pale as a ghost and tired to death, and must have a good long rest on the sofa after breakfast ere they start for the country. A long and a happy one did that rest prove in Mrs. St. Aubyn's pretty drawing-room ; the scent of the mignonette, as it stole in through the open window from the long green balcony outside, mingling in some mesmeric way with the sunshiny memories of the early morning, and that meeting in Our Lady's Church of the Seven Dolours.

Rachel, in her gratitude, would fain have given the sacred edifice a more gladsome name, and have baptized it as the Church of the Seven Joys. Long and happy too was the whole bright day afterwards with Mrs. St. Aubyn and her school children in the fields near Richmond. The flowers they met with were but common ones—buttercups and daisies for the most part, and the children noisy and exacting, requiring no small amount of personal exertion

and amusement—yet to Rachel the buttercups were as bells of gold chiming continually but one name, and the meek daisies (little dreamt they of the honour) descended stars—while the noisy children—oh! they were detachments straight from fairy-land adding enchantment to the scene.

In London the wind, in pleasant temper enough at a respectful distance from its stately chimneys, got decidedly out of humour, and vented the same anger by driving the dust into people's eyes and houses—blinding the one, upsetting the furniture of the other, and doing in short all the mischief possible. It drove furiously into the room where May Templeton was sitting hard at work—stitch, stitch, stitch,—as though her life, if not her livelihood, depended on that little needle's velocity—oversetting at one fell blast Algernon's flower-stand and scattering the mould therefrom about the carpet. May rose to close the window and replace the fallen plants. One or two were broken from the stem and could not by any amount of ingenuity be replanted. Among these was a white hyacinth—Algernon's favourite, of favourites, and, like most other of the little boy's belongings in the way of pleasure or amusement, a proof of Lord St. Clair's affection, who had carried in his own hand the plant all the way from Haseldyne Park conservatory, on returning from his last visit there, as an Easter offering to his pet.

How fortunate we are not all clairvoyants! Had Algernon beheld from the playground, not many yards distant, his disabled flower, the game of leap-frog would have been spoiled for that day! Had Rachel heard the sigh, or have seen the look in May's dark eyes as she placed the hyacinth in a vase of water by her side, and resumed her needlework, the golden buttercups would have ceased to chime so musically, and the children's laughter have become changed

into discord. Two hours later Algernon returned home ; he was but eight years old, and may be forgiven a tear or two at the sight of his irreparable misfortune.

"But never mind, May," said the child, when, the first burst of vexation having subsided, he had leisure to observe her look of sorrow at the accident ; "it was not your fault, it was the naughty wind's ; and *you* shall be my white hyacinth now instead of that pretty broken thing, till St. Clair brings me a fresh one, which he is sure to do when I tell him of it. The wicked wind can't break you, May, can it ?" continued the boy impatiently, half anxious to conceal his own chagrin, and more than half to reassure May's spirit. "The wind can't break *you*—can it ?"

May smiled and answered, "No."

Perhaps she remembered the white hyacinth could never again be broken ; cast to the earth once and for ever, no wind, however stormy, would henceforth have power to shatter its fragile stem in twain.

The week following, May received another letter from Lord St. Clair, kindly and affectionately written. He could not call, but did not like to leave England without bidding her farewell, and expressing the sincerest wishes for her present and future happiness. He had at the request of a government friend undertaken a foreign mission of some importance, which would detain him abroad for an indefinite period, possibly for years ; he desired his kindest love to dear Rachel and little Algernon, and had forwarded a parcel to the latter, which arrived by the train that same evening. It contained a number of story-books, and all the little chorister's favourite hymns and anthems, beautifully illuminated by Lord St. Clair's own hand, and arranged according to the choir directions at St. Mary's. In an envelope was enclosed a cheque for £20 for Algernon, to

spend at his discretion. School-boys, especially choristers, often wanted money. There was the altar to decorate, and various other little ecclesiastical matters they naturally liked to have a hand in.

"Dear Lord St. Clair," exclaimed Algernon, as he read the letter over and over again; "how kind and good he is, and how very sorry I am he is going to leave us. Oh, May dear, I wish he could stay in England and marry you, because then you know he would be my very own brother, and Rachel's too, and that would be so jolly! I wish some of the good fairies would put it into his head; they might quite as well put it into his head as put it into mine, and a great deal better, because, of course, I mustn't tell St. Clair what the fairies say; boys never tell gentlemen how glad they would be if they would marry their sisters. Phœbe told me so one day when I asked her about it; she said they must never do no such a audacious thing, not on no account, and that a audacious thing was next worst to a wicked thing. I do wish old Phœbe would learn to speak good grammar like us school-boys; but I must go and show her my presents; how pleased she will be—almost as pleased as I am."

Rachel was still with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and in total ignorance of what had occurred during her absence. She came home the day after the receipt of the above letter, the day St. Clair started from London.

Never before had May felt so pitiful a coward as when called upon to perform one of life's hardest tasks, and communicate "bad news" to one her utmost of affection had proved powerless to shelter from suffering. The dreaded agony, however, to all external appearances, was far absent. Rachel's calmness not only surprised, but absolutely astonished her sister, and scarcely prevented her looking forward

with increased fear to some terrible reaction. Be that as it may, however pregnant with suffering the future might be fraught, Rachel's first sensation of the news of St. Clair's departure was one of positive relief. Suspense was over, its torture and its martyrdom ; and for many subsequent days did the maiden console her else bleeding spirit with the oft-repeated truism—for to her, if not to others, it had assumed the name—that suspense *was*, and to her always would be, worse than separation—worse than death—worse than the worst certainty—that horrible heart-wearing, soul-sickening suspense. Rachel went to church regularly now ; prayer was no longer a weariness. The desertion had been but a temporary one, briefly temporary, for rebellion was foreign to a nature at once loyal and meek-hearted—wavering, but not unstable. The little figure was seldom absent now from Mass or Benediction either at St. Mary's or some other church in the neighbourhood ; nor did body and spirit any longer, as heretofore, part company at the porchway.

There was one exception, however, to the rule in Rachel's church-going, for no inducement, not even Mrs. St. Aubyn's, ever again enticed from her a visit to Our Lady of the Seven Dolours. Mrs. St. Aubyn was surprised at her obstinate little friend's frequent refusals to accompany her thither, and sometimes inquired with a smile—a very wistful one, for Mrs. St. Aubyn had not always been a Catholic—whether Rachel expected to hear any heretical doctrine promulgated from the altar of our Lady of Sorrows, and thought it safer to keep away ; but for once Rachel, not a very unpersuadable person under ordinary circumstances, refused either to yield or deliver up her reasons, and by degrees Mrs. St. Aubyn ceased either to smile or to ask questions. Hers was a curiosity that never,

by the remotest chance, risked outstepping the bounds of kind feeling ; besides, she was, as we know, a busy woman —“fond of poking into workhouses,” &c.—and busy people are safe friends. They have little time to be curious—short leisure for gossip—none whatever for mischief-making—and in Mrs. St. Aubyn’s case, as it fortunately happened both for one and the other, still less inclination.

CHAPTER XV.

“ Fair Florence, queen of Arno’s lovely vale,
Justice and truth, indignant, heard thy tale,
And sternly smiled in retribution’s hour
To wrest thy treasures from the spoiler’s power !
Athens of Italy ! once more are thine
Those matchless gems of art’s exhaustless mine.
Florence ! the oppressor’s noon of pride is o’er,
Rise in thy pomp again, and weep no more ! ”

FELICIA HEMANS.

WHO will not gladly leave London, with its smoke, dust, and turmoil for a while, and accompany us to Italy ?—the land of the Madonna—the land of love, and song, and sunny skies—bright flowers and glorious churches—the birthplace and the grave of Raphael, Fra Angelico, Carlo Dolce, Titian, Michael Angelo, Dante, Tasso, and a thousand whose names have long ago crept into and become engraven on the memory not alone of poet and dreamer—the man of taste and worshipper of science—but into that also of the very school-boy, who, thoughtful and imaginative as school-boys can occasionally afford to be, has already learnt to reverence the land multitudes of the great, the noble, the inspired ones of the earth honoured by their birth, immortalized in life, and canonized in death.

“ The land of departed fame, whose classic plains
Have proudly echo’d to immortal strains !
Home of the arts ! where Glory’s faded smile
Sheds lingering light o’er many a mouldering pile ;
Proud wreck of vanish’d power, of splendour fled ;
Majestic temple of the mighty dead ;

Where heroes slumber on the battle-plains,
'Mid prostrate altars and deserted fanes,
And fancy communes in each lonely spot,
With shades of those who ne'er shall be forgot.
Oh, high in thought—magnificent in soul—
Born to inspire, enlighten, and control ! ”

The noonday sun is shining brightly down upon the azure-tinted mountains beneath, whose undulating yet lofty crests, their points sharply defined against the translucent sky, are bending with graceful humility into the wood-embosomed valley of the Arno; and then, as if too proudly conscious of their beauty to remain there, rise once more with all the majesty of a white-robed queen to the elevated plains. Beyond them lies Firenze—Florence the beautiful, the Athens of Italy, or the “Fair City of Flowers,” as her inhabitants delight to call her, surrounded, as far as the eye can reach, with glittering villages and gently-wooded hills, the summits clustered with churches, convents, and villas, or rather palaces for their extent and architectural symmetry, interspersed with many a garden and graceful vineyard—these again shadowed with forests of pine, blended with the dark mysterious olive-tree, the very sight of which sends a thrill of sadness through the Christian's soul, otherwise, perchance, almost over-intoxicated with the scene.

Come with us to the hill of Fiesole—the “Cradle of Florence”—and gaze down upon the vision we have so faintly endeavoured to describe from thence; and while along this region of smiling loveliness you watch the silvery Arno winding its thread-like course to the ocean, tell us whether, among the lovely scenes of this lovely earth, imagination can paint a fairer! Can any one ascend Fiesole without realizing more vividly than before the melancholy

affection of the poet for this land of pathetic loveliness, when with his—

“ Italia, oh Italia ! thou who hast the fatal gift of beauty ”—

he pours out to her his song. Grievous is it to call you away, reader, from fairy-like Fiesole to any place on earth so uncelestial as an hotel ; but we, poor mortals, cannot always, even in Italy, luxuriate in fairy-land ; we must descend, therefore, the pine-clad hill, soothed and tranquillized by the myrtle-embalmed air around, mingled with the scent of rose and orange blossom ; and passing beside many a picturesque villa, open church, and ivy-grown ruin of historic or traditional interest, we enter through the Porta San Piento, and in ten minutes afterwards reach the Hôtel Impérial, one of the best and most frequented by the English in Florence. We pass through the hall and open the door of an elegantly-furnished apartment opening on a terrace, at the extremity of which, flowing gaily along, the Arno once more displays her silver face to view. Another face, too, greets our entrance—the face of an older, though not fairer acquaintance, than the dancing river. Lady Adelaide Mansfield looks up as we approach nearer, and welcomes our arrival. Friends from England, unworthy ones even as ourselves, are seldom unwelcomed in a foreign land, especially by the lonely ; and Lady Adelaide is one of those lonely and alone—terms not at all times synonymous, but with her at the present moment walking hand in hand ;—nor is the present moment the first one either—no, nor the present hour—no, nor, alas ! that our task is to record it, the present day ! Lady Adelaide’s loneliness is an event of no uncommon occurrence, and yet, for we are creatures of habit and get used to anything, she is growing accustomed to it. Little more than a year has elapsed since her marriage, and she is no longer, even in her

own imagination, an idol. Too late, and yet too soon, has she made the discovery that the said imagination has had more to do all along with Sir Allen's devotion to herself, than the reality his former wild profession of affection, added to his pertinacity in seeking her hand, regardless apparently of self-love or vanity, had led her to believe existed, and under influence of which belief she had married him. Long ere the day we find her in Florence had she begun to repent the ill-advised step so hastily, she dared not say thoughtlessly, taken, and now as uselessly deplored; and yet who to blame but herself for the unforeseen denouement?

Who, when their life-bark founders on the shoal of consequence, can venture to complain, or even to wonder, if the chart they steered by had not for its signature a pure intention? "Pshaw!" we hear some one exclaim, "why, with that even in our hands, we are times out of number *stranded!*" Granted, friend; but is it not *something* to sink gloriously, our chart for a pillow, and "acted for the best" our sheet-anchor, as we descend into the water, no stinging self-reproach gurgling in our ear? This anchor Lady Adelaide could not cling to. True she had been deceived. Sir Allen's affectation of love, and that in its most exaggerated form, had, in part, seemed to blindfold her better judgment; but not to that alone could the step she had taken be attributed. It might serve as an excuse; but excuse, at best, is but a poor argument, and Lady Adelaide for one scorned its use. Her fault—sin, if any one pleased to give it so harsh a name—was her own; she denied it not. Impatience to escape from home tyranny, cost what it might, had urged her on: but "cost what it might" is like many another careless boastful word, easier to speak than to sit down and rest upon, as Lady Adelaide found to her dismay when proof of their sincerity was, little as she expected it—and sooner far, said self-love, than even *her*

wilfulness deserved—haughtily demanded of their speaker. “Cost what it might!” Had she but weighed the sentence in all its bearings, a few months ago—better still, had she prayed over, instead of acting upon, the reckless words—she and St. Clair might still have been wandering in the woods at Haseldyne, heart free and hand unfettered by that ring she would fain have torn from her finger in passionate remorse as day by day it met her view. “Cost what it might!”—the low, common-place, matter-of-fact, every-day words—they sounded like a challenge; yes, they had been so intended. She had challenged her fate, and the challenge had been accepted; had dared the future, and must abide the consequence—peaceful or else peaceless conclusion—peaceful to the patient, the humble, the subdued—peaceless to one who, like herself, would fain quarrel with the fate she had invoked. “Cost what it might!” Had the words always been pronounced thus heedlessly? No, not always; not when martyrs, with uplifted eye, dared to use them in the amphitheatre, and proved their reality at the lion’s mouth. Not when on the rack, the wheel, or worse than these, in the long, lingering captivity, boy and girl, bright maiden and aged saint durst brave the challenge and act it out in death. Not always have Lady Adelaide’s words been uttered thus recklessly; and she had read of these—read to admire, not to imitate, except in this much, that, with something of the same impassioned desire they had run to *embrace*, she had striven to *flee* from, suffering. Nor was resistance over yet. Disappointed and self-reproachful, yet proud of spirit and independent as of yore, Adelaide’s assumption of indifference was but the calm preceding a life-long struggle for victory—victory over him—rebellion to his tyranny; for, to her, neglect, forgetfulness, cold indifference from him, to whom alone now she had any right to look for happiness, was indeed tyranny. It galled

her proud heart to the quick. Beneath her father's roof, although thwarted, and seldom free from annoyance on the part of her stepmother, the daughter of the Earl of Morley, had many another interest to divert her attention, abundance of friends to admire, and many to love her; for Adelaide could be lovable, very lovable, to the few who cared to win her affection, for its own sake; and, having a pretty quick appreciation of character on that point, she was not easily deceived. Had her husband really loved her, spite of his faults and their dissimilarity of feeling and character, she would, in all probability, have proved a good and affectionate wife; but, as it was, her wounded spirit rose in rebellion, and she determined to resent his conduct with all the passion of her nature. Lady Adelaide was surprised, on the day we were describing, by Sir Allen's unwonted appearance at the luncheon-hour. He was seldom visible till dinner-time, and did not scruple to leave his fair wife pretty much to her own devices the remainder of the day. As to Lady Adelaide, she had long ceased to inquire after Sir Allen's daily occupation and interests—the question, when she did so presume, being always either evaded, or met by suggestion, made with ill-concealed displeasure, as to the wisdom of attending to her own pursuits, and not interfering with those of her husband.

Sir Allen and his wife had only arrived in Florence the preceding week, having passed the winter subsequent to their marriage in Paris, and the remaining months on a tour through Belgium and the upper part of Germany, staying weeks at a time in any town where Sir Allen, who had, in former years, been a great traveller, happened either to have or pick up an agreeable acquaintance. Small amusement this to Lady Adelaide, to whom her husband's friends, whether of the lady or gentleman *genus*, were not only entire strangers, but, for the most part, a type of the

stranger tribe with whom she was well content to cultivate an arm's-length acquaintanceship—a type, in short, she had sufficient confidence in her husband's fastidious taste, if not good feeling, to believe he would have hesitated in introducing to herself, even if it were possible for him to find personal gratification in their society. Lady Adelaide had yet to learn that a fastidious taste claims for its exercise a wider margin than good feeling wots of, when self-interest, or some other world-wise inducement, renders it expedient. It was on this point the newly-espoused first came to an open disagreement.

While in Paris, Lady Adelaide, surrounded by her own circle of society, and occupied from morning till night in a whirl of dissipation, had little leisure to observe, or indeed to regret, Sir Allen's frequent absence from her side. Neither were any uncongenial faces at that time permitted to jar upon her presence. But since their departure from the said gay metropolis, things had assumed a different aspect. Lady Adelaide found at once more time upon her hands for observation, and rather more than enough for discontent. Sir Allen's look of quiet sarcasm, of cool indifference, when she at length ventured to remonstrate on the style of people he was continually bringing her in contact with—and his reply that a woman's vocation was to make herself agreeable to her husband's friends, whether they happened to coincide with her aristocratic whims or otherwise—were precisely the style of argument his listener was unaccustomed to. Had he made a favour of the matter, transformed his words into a request, that for his sake she would set her own feelings aside, had he attempted the slightest apology for having unwittingly outraged those aristocratic fancies, over-refined, even capricious as they might have been considered, Sir Allen's wife, however reluctantly, would have yielded; for selfishness, though with her, as with most mankind, a sore

temptation, was not Adelaide's besetting sin. Affection could, at any moment, change the monster into sacrifice. A similar compliment could not, by any stretch of charity, be paid to Sir Allen. Persuasion, or compromise, except when obligatory, were words unknown to him. Self, under one form or another, was the god of his idolatry; and his wife, or dependants, if they sought for peace, nay, for aught but perpetual discord, must learn to bow, and bow unmurmuringly to the same well-honoured deity. Bow, indeed! and to him! Lady Adelaide would have preferred kneeling to Dagon. No man on earth should wring such worship from her soul, not unless indeed she *loved* him—loved him as she loved St. Clair; but then it would be to the *love*, not to the man, her proud will bent its worship. Her marriage-vow!—what of that? The contract had been a mutual one—his to cherish and protect, hers to obey till, only *till*, the above pledge was broken. It *had* been broken; and, in so far as affection or obedience went, hers was null and void. The possibility of an individual responsibility, apart from Sir Allen's, let him act as he would, never crossed her imagination, or crossed it merely to be set aside with derision. Had any voice in the silence of night, or at some other unlooked-for time, accused Lady Adelaide of want of principle, she would have started. Refined, intellectual, pure-minded, and generous, yet with a spiritual nature not alone wholly undisciplined, but also uneducated, more ignorant of its positive obligations than one of the veriest school-children in her brother's class at Haseldyne, she would proudly have denied the charge. Want of principle, indeed!—the world should never have the happiness of urging the accusation on her account. The name of Lord St. Clair's sister, the Earl of Morley's child, whatever other might be attached to it, should descend to the grave untarnished even by the breath of slander. Who then

dared call her unprincipled! For the rest: her conduct towards her husband should be the echo of his own; she was ready either, as far as in her lay, to reciprocate affection, to return kindness for kindness, consideration for consideration, or scorn for scorn. One concession alone: the provocation, in its commencement, should never proceed from herself, and with this salve conscience must rest satisfied.

Under this aspect of life and its duties, our Florentine visitors meet us on the morning in question. Rapt in the mysteries of an Italian novel, in which four or five hours had been beguiled, Lady Adelaide had not noticed her husband's entrance, till, on his drawing a chair to the table and pouring out a glass of lemonade, she looked up, half dreamily and half surprised; and then, turning over a fresh leaf, resumed the perusal.

"May I trouble you," began Sir Allen, abruptly, "to lay aside that absurd novel for a few moments, and attend to what I am about to say?"

The cold hardness, added to the tone of command, was too much for Lady Adelaide, always now ready for irritation. The colour sprang to her cheek as she coldly requested Sir Allen to wait a few moments, the chapter her attention was engaged upon neared its conclusion. There were but a few lines yet to the finale.

Sir Allen, without an instant's deliberation, rose, glass in hand, approached the sofa, and, taking the book from his wife's hand, threw it carelessly, not violently, to the other end of the apartment. A scornful smile passed over Lady Adelaide's face, but she said nothing. Leaning back quietly on the sofa, she took up some fancy knitting lying by her side, and began arranging the stitches for the next row, studying her pattern, from time to time, with an attention and interest which could suggest no other idea but that the

directions to "knit two pearl one," "turn over six," and "bring the needle round from where you began," were, in her opinion, of far more importance than all the husbands' tempers in the world put together, and shaken up in a basket till they got straight again.

Sir Allen regarded both her and the knitting with an angry scowl, but cared not, as it appeared, to exert the same authority over the latter amusement he had wasted upon the ill-fated novel.

"*Your* time, Lady Adelaide," he said, after a short pause, and in a voice less arbitrary than before, "may be, and very likely is, of little consequence; but mine is not so easily trifled with. I have, at this moment, business outside requiring my attention, and really am at a loss to comprehend, quite as little as I am disposed to submit to, your refusal even to listen to my——"

"Commands!" echoed his wife, in the same icy tone. "I beg your pardon, Sir Allen; you behold me entirely at your service."

"Command is not the word I should have used, unless compelled to do so." Sir Allen, for once, was becoming, for him at least, wondrously amiable. "I simply looked in this morning to express a wish, and it is the following:—that you will be kind enough to drive this afternoon to the convent of the Annunziata—the convent, you know, where that child Lucia you are always tormenting me about, is residing. There are some confounded reports set about here by those rascally Englishwomen, who, whether in their own country or abroad, understand every one else's business better than their own, as to my neglecting the little idiot; and therefore, I suppose, for the sake, forsooth, of shutting their gossip-loving mouths, I must be pestered with the child at home. Bring her back with you in the carriage; and then, if you wish, as no doubt

you do, particularly to oblige your husband," and Sir Allen scarcely repressed a sneer, "keep the young lady as much out of his sight as possible. I detest children, especially girls."

Lady Adelaide's heart bounded as Sir Allen proceeded, though not for the universe would she have let him perceive the pleasure conveyed to her by his communication. The truth was, that ever since her marriage—particularly during the last six months' desolation—she had been yearning to see Lucia, and, as Sir Allen remarked, had tormented his life out on the subject; which, being interpreted, meant that once or twice she had expressed a wish to become acquainted with his little girl; to say more than that Lady Adelaide quickly discovered only served to defeat her object. That even as it was, Sir Allen had purposely delayed for the last year his proposed visit to Florence she felt certain; but the notice of the delay and sudden alteration of his plan for the summer were both alike mysteries to Lady Adelaide, who, now the joyful news of *Lucia's coming home* was really announced, cared little to attempt the hopeless task of diving into Sir Allen's motives, either past, present, or to come. The former proposal of Lucia's returning to live with them altogether had been so decidedly and so frequently ignored, that the utmost Lady Adelaide had looked forward to in coming to Florence, was an occasional visit to the convent, and a few formal interviews with the unknown Lucia—in the presence of lady abbess, nun, or novice, or some of the various female dignitaries of stiff manner and solemn visage with whom Lady Adelaide's imagination had long ago associated the awful words Catholic convent and religious house. But to have the wish of her heart thus unexpectedly gratified by hearing Lucia was to return home altogether, this was indeed pleasant—pleasanter than anything that had occurred for months. She would have a

dear, innocent child to cling to now, and not feel so terribly lonely. The daily craving for sympathy would be satisfied. Even a child's sympathy was something of more value sometimes than any other—especially to a mind like her own, at once proud and affectionate. Famished for lack of nourishment and yet ready rather to starve than seek sustenance at the cost of humiliation before an equal, or even a superior, should the superiority be a too obvious one, in the society of a child this feeling vanished. The superiority of innocence is one that without degradation to ourselves we can afford submission to.

Looking at her watch, and then at Sir Allen with an expression almost affectionate, and as if momentarily impressed with the idea of Lucia's return home being, instead of a disagreeable necessity, intended as a graceful concession to her wishes, Lady Adelaide promised in an hour's time to be ready for the drive, if her husband would kindly give orders for the carriage, and direct the coachman to the convent, she herself being ignorant of the locality.

Sir Allen was satisfied by her immediate acquiescence to his commands—for commands they certainly had been—rather different from the opposition he was usually accustomed to meet with from her ladyship. He went to give the orders, but returned on reaching the door, to say, in a marvellously-softened tone, "And Adelaide, mind, if Lucia has any absurd notions in her head about me, and makes a fuss about accompanying you here, not to pay any attention to her. She must come whether agreeable to her or otherwise. But children, as I dare say you are aware, often take absurd fancies into their heads, which nothing but severity will ever tend to uproot. This may or may not be the case with Lucia at present. She had a bad nurse in her infancy, who out of sheer spite for some offence I happened to give the woman—Italians, you know, being proverbially resentful,

and she about the greatest vixen of her race—chose to vent her fury by imbuing the child's mind with all sorts of frightful images about her father. Consequently no love has ever been lost between me and Miss Lucia. I did not discover the woman's iniquity—she was a thorough bad one altogether—till after my—Sir Allen's face paled—I mean till after she was dismissed, or I would have packed her off long before. It is possible that Lucia, who was very young at the time, may have forgotten her nursery lessons; but I warn you, in case she should ever allude to this woman, who made a great pet of her, in fact completely spoiled the child, unless the nuns have undone the mischief—and I make it my particular request, Adelaide—as Lucia's father, if for no other consideration—that this person's name I have mentioned be never allowed, if possible, to pass my child's lips, much less be a permitted subject of conversation. She was her poor mother's horror.”

The last words were hurried out as Sir Allen turned quickly from the sofa. He picked up Adelaide's novel before quitting the room, and laid it on the table, saying apologetically, “You know how passionate I am, Adelaide; you ought not to have provoked me.”

The moment after his wife sprung from the sofa as though endued with new life, and rang for her maid; and in less than the promised hour was on her way to the convent of the Annunziata. During the course of the quarter of an hour's drive thither, Adelaide had leisure to reflect on her husband's parting injunctions. The description of Lucia and her childish antecedents was certainly not a fascinating one; and had Sir Allen's conduct to herself been cast in a different mould, little doubt remains but that his wife's anticipations in the approaching meeting would have been in great measure damped, if not altogether shorn of their attractions. A loveless child; the

baby confidant of a woman whose very name it would stain her lips to utter, and yet a woman to whose memory, and in opposition to the will of her father, with strange unnatural perversity her affection was still supposed to cling, would have been in the eyes of a loving wife, a twelve months' trustful bride, more an object of pity than attraction—of unconfessed aversion, perhaps, rather than motherly love.

Lady Adelaide did not disbelieve her husband's assertions. She was unsuspicious naturally, and having no real cause to doubt his veracity, did not, after the example of some folks we are acquainted with, jump at the conclusion, that because a human being is to one or two, he must, as a matter of course, be also victim to the whole list of sins forbidden in the decalogue. She lent full credit to Sir Allen's story, though it fell fruitlessly on her ear as regarded Lucia; for, independently of the nurse story, it struck Adelaide that a man who had even over her proud heart the power of inspiring some degree of fear, might easily have erected a similar dread on the part of a child; in a child's heart love and fear being seldom bosom friends. That her husband's wishes about Lucia should be complied with, she acknowledged instinctively as a point of honour. Had there even been just cause for doubt on the matter, Adelaide's natural generosity would have come to the rescue and outweighed the balance. A prejudiced ear—putting aside its being also a wife's—was not the one to heed or listen to the charges a child's tenacious memory might possibly be ready, if encouraged, to bring against its father.

As she arrived at this conclusion, the carriage stopped before the convent of the Annunziata—a building of much architectural symmetry, attached to a church of the same name. The portress, who, after a brief survey at the

grating, admitted Lady Adelaide, was habited in the quaint dress of the Ursulines. With a smile and a few words of Italian welcome, she conducted her visitor along a corridor, the walls of which were decorated with magnificent frescoes representing scenes from the lives of various saints. The nun left Lady Adelaide in the convent-parlour, saying, in broken but not bad English, she would tell the superioress of her arrival. The room was a small one, simply furnished ; a life-size crucifix, and one or two pictures, the only ornaments, with the exception of a vase filled with freshly-gathered flowers ; and a few books—some of a religious and others of a secular character—lying on the table in the centre. The window opened to the ground, and the scent of jessamine, and other shrubs, together with the sound of children's voices and ringing laughter, came laden on the air.

Lady Adelaide was not kept long waiting ere the superioress entered. She was a lady advanced in years, and of a gentle and benignant aspect. She received her visitor with affectionate courtesy, and listened to Sir Allen's message, conveyed of course in the most graceful terms politeness could suggest by Lady Adelaide (who could not but fear the abruptness of the proceeding would annoy Lucia's protectress), with patient attention.

"Do not distress yourself, dear madam," said the mother prioress, forming a pretty shrewd guess from her visitor's manner of what was passing in her mind. "We are used to these things, and must learn, when duty requires it, to part from our little treasures without grumbling. Lucia may, indeed, be counted among the number. She is a sweet child, though by no means a faultless one. God grant she prove a comfort to you in the future, my daughter."

Adelaide's eye glistened. The sweetness of the tone, so different from that to which she was accustomed, affected her deeply, while the words "God grant she prove a comfort to you!" completed the victory. The child's instinct, so long repressed, awoke within her, and the word "mother" sprang to her lip. "Don't make a fool of yourself," whispered second thoughts. Conventual terms, like all others, are merely technical. You are nothing to her, or she to you, in reality. Less than nothing, did she know you were a Protestant.

At this moment, in answer to the parlour-bell, a lay sister stood at the door.

"Request Sister Agnese to come to me for a few moments," was the message given, and ere Adelaide found time to frame another sentence, a young and bright-looking nun made her appearance.

"This is the sister to whose charge is committed the principal care of the pensioners, madam. I will, with your permission, leave her with you for the present, my presence being required elsewhere. She will also bring Lucia to you—the sooner the better, perhaps. You are, doubtless, longing to embrace your little daughter. I shall see you again ere you leave the convent, and often afterwards, I trust," said the prioress, as, motioning sister Agnese to the garden, she quitted the parlour.

"A religious house is not so dreary an abode after all," thought Adelaide, as her eye followed the young nun across the lawn in search of Lucia, who, it being the afternoon recreation-hour, was playing with the rest of the pensioners in the convent garden, chasing the little ones round the acacia-trees, or swinging them to and fro in the wicker seats erected for the purpose.

"There is Sister Agnese," cried several of the party in a

breath, scampering off to meet her, and then clinging and buzzing around her like so many bees swarming round their queen-mother. "Come and play with us, Sister Agnese; we won't let you go till you promise," threatened one saucy little mortal after another.

"Presently, *carissima mia*—presently," said the sister, attempting in vain to disengage her habit from their grasp. "Come, run off like good little children, and by-and-by Sister Agnese will return to see what the birds of the air can bring along with her. I must call Sister Maria Veronica to my rescue—Sister Maria!" and she slightly raised her voice—"where are you?"

"Here," replied the nun, as she obeyed the summons, and playfully released Sister Agnese from thralldom.

"Lucia, *cara mia*, I want you," said the latter, to a grave-looking child, too pale for prettiness, and too oriental-eyed to be called plain, as she was running off with the rest—"I want to speak to you alone. Come and walk round the garden, and let us have a little talk together, as we have often done before;" and she put her hand caressingly on the child's head.

"Ah! that is always such a treat, dear sister," said Lucia, returning the caress by entwining her hand in the girdle encircling the nun's waist, and twisting the long rosary thereto attached round her small slender neck. "I do so love those nice long talks with you, and I am tired of play; play is very nice too, only it tires one so. Well, what shall we talk about, sister? Will you tell me one of those pretty legends out of that great book in the refectory, or may I ask you some of the puzzling questions that come into my head when I lie awake at night, or at meditation-time?"

"Neither of these to-day, my Lucia; I have something to say that I fear at first will cause you a little unhappiness; but you will try to bear it like a brave Lucia, and do your

duty to God in the world, and be as good a little child to Him there as you have lately been in the convent."

"What do mean, sister dear?" said the child, raising her lustrous eyes with a puzzled expression to the peaceful face looking down upon her;—"what can you mean? I have not learned nearly everything yet, have I? The school-girls in the first class said, the other day, that my education would not be finished for eight years to come—not till I am seventeen. I felt so glad when they told me that, because I thought to myself, eight more happy years before I leave the dear sisters and school-fellows and mother prioress, and my lovely, lovely Florence. Oh, sister, what shall I do when I am a woman, and have to go away into the great big world, with no one to love me, no one to tell my thoughts to? I cannot bear to think of that time! Why do you talk about it now, sister?—eight years is a long, long time to come! Why do you talk about serving God in the world now?"

"Because, my little one, I am obliged; it is not my own choice. The same duty which compels me to bear the intelligence, bids you accept it cheerfully, dear child. You are called upon for the present, at all events, to leave us and return to the world."

"Oh, sister, you are not surely in earnest!—it cannot be true! Mother prioress won't really be so cruel as to send me away from the convent, though I am sometimes naughty and passionate. I have not been so for a long time—not since my First Communion. Oh, pray don't send me away from you—pray, pray ask her not, Sister Agnese, I can't bear it—I shall break my heart!" and she hid her face in her pinafore.

"We do not wish to send you away, dearest child. It gives us as much pain nearly as yourself to be obliged to do so; but your papa has sent for you, Lucia, and a child's

first earthly duty is to obey her parents. You have not forgotten that, have you, *cara mia* ? ”

“ My papa ! ” ejaculated the child vehemently, “ my papa sent for me ! I won’t go back to him—no, that I won’t ! He is a wicked, cruel man—he is, he is ! I will tell everybody so, if he takes me away from here. I daren’t go back to him, and I won’t ; he will kill me as he did mamma ”—and, more in terror than naughtiness, she stamped her foot upon the ground.

“ Hush ! Lucia—hush ! ” said the sister, “ you must not speak in that way of your father. It is you who are wicked now. I did not think my Lucia would so quickly have forgotten all her promises, nor all poor sister Agnese, who loves her so dearly, has tried to teach her.”

“ But it is the truth, dear sister ; indeed it is. And you always bid me speak the truth. He *is* a wicked man—a very, very wicked man ; he killed my mamma—my own dear, dear mamma. I saw him strike her beautiful forehead, and she never got well afterwards. Manetta wanted to make me tell a story about it then, but I would not—I would not speak at all. I hate stories—I hate wicked people ; and I won’t go back to my papa. I would rather be dead and buried. It frightens me in the night to think about him and the black lady Manetta used to tell me of ; though I know there’s no real black lady, it frightens me to think about it till I look through the window at the end of the dormitory and see the lamp burning before the altar in the little chapel. It was so kind of reverend mother to let me sleep next that window,—but there will be no lamp in papa’s house. I daren’t go back. If he takes me by force, I will run away from him, I will run and run until I die ; ” and Lucia threw herself, with more than a child’s passionate vehemence, on the turf beneath their feet.

“ Rise, Lucia, immediately,” said Sister Agnese, in a tone

gentle though severe. "If you behave thus, I shall doubt your love for any of us."

The child obeyed, and throwing her arms round the nun's slender waist, sobbed bitterly.

"Lucia, tell me, my child,"—severity had no share in the voice now—"what are the chief motives of our holy faith?"

"Humility and obedience," murmured Lucia, in a subdued, shame-stricken voice.

"And whom does the same holy faith set before us as the great pattern of these virtues, Lucia?"

The interrogator bent her head at the whispered reply. "And whither, if imitated, will they conduct us Lucia, *caramia*?" How joyous became the catechiser's voice.

"There said the child," raising her dark eyes heavenwards: "I wish I were there now, Sister Agnese."

"That is an easy wish, Lucia, and too often an idle one. God is too good—too beautiful—too full of love to be served by idle wishes, He deserves something better than that; does He not, my little one?"

"Yes, sister Agnese; but then, if God is so good, why does He allow my papa to be so wicked? That is one of my puzzling questions. I know God does not *make* him wicked, it is the devil; but then, why does He let the devil make people wicked? God is stronger than Satan, is He not? Why does He not conquer him?"

"He *has* conquered him," said the nun, raising the crucifix from her side, and pressing it to her bosom. "He is stronger, or else the battle were indeed a lost one, struggle as we might. Lucia, when these thoughts come into your head, you must remember that God will not *drive* people into heaven, like so many cattle. He invites them in, and here behold the history of His invitation. Lucia, was any invitation ever so loving?—any invitation as heartlessly rejected?" and she again pointed to the crucifix.

"No," replied the child, and the cloud passed from her brow. "I will never again say 'if God is good.' I will always believe that He *must* be good—goodness itself, even though people *ARE* allowed in this world to be so wicked. He would never have come down from the blue sky, and left the angels singing there, while He was kicked and laughed at, and oh! sister Agnese, spat upon (which seems to me the worst of all), and then nailed to the dreadful cross, if He were not very good, and wanted us, every single one of us, to be good and happy for ever. I will go back to my papa now, Sister Agnese, if he wants me, only let me first go into the chapel and make the acts of love and contrition. I will say them aloud, that the devil may hear them, and not come teasing me any more with those puzzling thoughts about God."

They had reached the chapel door, and the child and sister knelt on the threshold, while the former, with clasped hands, lisped her prayer—the prayer each child of the Catholic Church is familiar with from babyhood:—"Oh, my God, I love Thee above all things, because Thou art infinitely good in Thyself, and infinitely to be loved; and, for the love of Thee, I will love all men as myself." Then followed the act of contrition, and Lucia was about to rise when, as if struck by a sudden thought, she asked the sister's permission to repeat also the act of faith.

Satisfied by the change of expression in her pupil's face, the nun inquired the reason of her last request.

"Because you know, Sister Agnese," and the terrified look returned, "he might wish me to give it up—papa might—he might command me, but I cannot do that. I will obey him in everything else, and not give up my religion. Listen to me—listen—listen to me, sweet Lady! Listen to me, holy angels,—listen to me, wicked devil!"

The nun, fearing she was getting into one of the fits of

nervous excitement that, ever since the child had been placed under their charge, she had been periodically subject to, tried to stop her, but in vain; and the words, when once begun, were at once too sweet and too awful to be interrupted.

"Let me repeat them," said Lucia, "and then, sister, I will be quiet,"—drawing a few steps nearer the altar. "Oh! my God, I believe in all that Thou hast revealed, and which the Holy Catholic Church requires to be believed, because Thou art the very truth itself, which can neither deceive or be deceived. In this holy faith I desire to live and die. No, not *desire*," continued the excitable child, raising her eyes to the tabernacle, bringing out each word with an emphasis and solemnity far beyond her years; "in this holy faith I WILL live and die—I WILL live and die!" She would again and again have reiterated the vow, had not the nun's hand been placed before her mouth.

"That will do, my child," said the young sister, gently, drawing her away from the chapel. "We must not be passionate in the presence of God, even in a good cause; you are quite right to love your faith, quite right to promise God you always will love it; but never forget, *cara mia*, that the Catholic faith is a meek and lowly one. Fight for it bravely, if need be. Endure death, rather than incur denial; but, at the same time, after the example of its founder, fight with gentleness and humility; and now, dear child, I have pleasant news, as well as sad, to tell you, and only waited till that little temper was subdued, and that naughty rebel will brought under, before I made Lucia smile at the thought of what is in store for her."

"Why, what can it be?" said Lucia, quickly relapsing into her original childishness, and springing over all the flower-beds in succession at Sister Agnese's extraordinary information of a new mamma, a young and pretty-looking

English lady, being at that moment in the parlour waiting to convey her home.

"Oh, Sister Agnese, that is indeed pleasant! it takes away a great bit of the sorrow. How good of God to send her. How sorry I am for having been so naughty. It reminds me of that English song one of the pensioners gave me the other day, called 'The Rose Peeping in at the Window.' This pretty new mamma will be my rose, will she not? not that I shall love her as I do my dead mamma,—my mamma in heaven; but still it is very nice,—only, Sister Agnese, I hope papa won't——"

"Hush, Lucia,—no more about that; perhaps he is very sorry for the past. How can you tell what he may not have suffered these last four years? It must be a terrible thing, a very terrible thing to have a great weight lying on one's soul, and no one to help lift it off;" and the young nun shuddered as the thought of another's misery crossed a spirit, to judge from its sunny index, no such weight had ever yet lain heavy on. "You must try to love him, Lucia; and if you cannot forget the past, you must forgive it. Above all, never talk in this way to your new mamma; it would make her very unhappy."

"Oh no, of course not," said Lucia, shaking her head sagely; "I would not for the world make my new mamma unhappy. Besides, it would frighten her so sadly; and nothing, is so cruel as to frighten people and make them tremble in the dark."

Lady Adelaide, meanwhile, was anxiously waiting in the parlour, wondering at the nun's delay, and trying, in imagination, to bring Lucia before her. Would it, or would it not, be possible to win the coming child's affection? That she was capable of withholding her love was already clear, and where her own guarantee for expecting to gain that which had been denied the little one's papa four years ago?

The bare fact of being his wife would stand little in her favour. Perhaps, after all, she was destined for another disappointment, and would find in little Lucia the same cold, hard nature already linked with her own. This last thought was clouding Lady Adelaide's meditations when the door-handle was slowly turned, and Lucia walked timidly in,—her face flushed with agitation, and eyes cast to the ground. Adelaide rose to meet and embrace her.

"Are you my new mamma?" was the half-shy, half-courageous question, as Lucia took the offered hand, and ventured a sidelong examination at the handsome English lady before her. The novel epithet delighted Adelaide.

"Yes, Lucia," she replied, kissing the little inquirer with enthusiasm. "I am your new mamma; will you try to love me?"

"If you are good," said the child with artless simplicity. "I always love good people;—are you good?"

The Italian accent and *naïveté* united were irresistible, yet Adelaide's smile was a sad one.

"I shall try to be, Lucia, if my goodness is to be the condition of your love."

"I think you ought to be good," continued Lady Adelaide's new-found daughter, growing momentarily more familiar, and stroking her mamma's cheek. "I think you ought to be good, because you are so pretty; and pretty people, Sister Agnese says, ought to be good—very good, like the flowers, which all live to the glory of God, and then are quite content to die, and never be seen any more; because there is nothing more left for them to do."

"Well, Lucia, we will both try to be like the flowers,—will we not? and now, what do you say to coming home with me? Is there a good deal of packing-up to be done, and leave-taking to go through?" Lucia looked up, Adelaide felt, reproachfully, and she corrected her hasty

inquiry. "I mean, dear, that of course you have a great deal to say to these kind sisters and your schoolfellows before you leave ; but then, you know, we can come and see them very often ; every day, if you like."

"Oh thank you—thank you, dear mamma ; how kind and good of you. But then,"—and the flush of excitement faded—"I am so frightened. I want to be good, indeed I do, but it is terrible to go away from here,—to feel so afraid of—of everybody else."

Adelaide understood, and regarded her pityingly.

"No one shall ever hurt or frighten you, Lucia, while under my care. I feel sure we shall be very happy together, and you will teach me all sorts of things," she answered. "How to speak Italian with that pretty pronunciation of yours and Sister Agnese's, to begin with ; and how to be a saint, if you can manage it ; only I suppose those happy people only exist in the atmosphere of convents ;" and Adelaide laughed, but again checked herself as the searching eyes met her gaze. They reminded her of England, and brought back the one or two faces there whose lives had crossed her pathway, and had told a far different tale ; had told of the term she had made use of having more than one interpretation, and of a convent's walls in order to win the title not always being a *sine quâ non*.

"Well, mamma, I must not keep you waiting any longer, or Sister Agnese will be vexed. I will go and say good-by to dear mother superioress and the rest, and be back in a few minutes with my bonnet on," said Lucia, as with lingering step and tearful eye she stole from the room.

Great were the lamentations in the convent at Lucia's departure, so sudden and unexpected both to sisters and children. She was an enthusiastic little creature, full of life and spirit at her games, and yet poetical and thoughtful in graver hours. Her very faults—and she had her full

share—were of a nature to render her more loveable than otherwise; and this, as the nuns often acknowledged, made the endeavour to correct them doubly arduous. Every one who has had to do with children, at once passionate and deeply loving, truthful and proud of their sincerity, will agree in this. In the world, both now and in after years, this disposition would necessarily, as the Mother Prioress tried to make Adelaide understand in the conversation they had during Lucia's leave-taking, be a formidable temptation to her charge.

Adelaide listened, very much with the feeling of the blind leading the blind, but made no further demonstration of humility than to remark politely, in answer to the little-understood difficulties urged on her attention, that she was sure Lucia must have been so well disciplined in the convent as to leave small care for future anxiety. She would, however, do the best to correct any faults that might become apparent; and during her stay in Florence, which might be either a short or protracted one, should always feel thankful for any advice on the subject either the Mother or Sister Agnese had leisure to afford her.

At length the sorrowful parting, like all other partings, whether gladsome or heartbreaking, was over; and with many a promise to pay frequent visits, and to write once a week on leaving Florence, Lucia departed with her new-found mamma, receiving at the door a fervent embrace and benediction from Sister Agnese, who retired to chant vespers in the choir, with another lesson from the spiritual life written on her soul, though not as yet *engraven* there; for she was but young in religion, was Sister Agnese, and the way of perfection is not altogether a flowery one. A thorn had fallen to-day as the sister walked softly along its pathway. No matter, it would help to weave the crown she had sworn (because naught else would still the

yearning of her heart) to wear on earth, and what else did she require? When Sister Agnese came into the choir, her look was grave, even sad, and once or twice a tear fell on the breviary before her; but when the last antiphon was intoned (they were celebrating a virgin-saint of the order) her eye brightened, and the sorrow was forgotten. Time indeed it was; for what nun's heart need keep sorrow in view, when the "Veni Spousa Christi" sounds upon her ear,—unless, indeed, she be too deaf to hearken, or blind to read, or old to remember,—and in that case the words must be so near their fulfilment as to make little difference whether they are hearkened to here or not. They will soon be heard elsewhere.

Sir Allen did not return to dinner that evening, which was quite as well, agreed the new mother and her daughter, leaving them all the more time to become mutually acquainted. Lady Adelaide had not, for many a long day, or week, or month, felt equally happy. Lucia was but eleven years old, but her natural quickness and the well-grounded education received in the convent, combined, had made as much a companion of her, in Adelaide's opinion, as a girl some five or six years her senior. They conversed chiefly in Italian, Lucia, of course, being more at home in that language than any other. Her enthusiastic attachment for Italy—the land of her own and her mother's birth, to whom she constantly, in the course of conversation, alluded—reminded Lady Adelaide of the Swiss mountaineers' "*amour patrie*." With the openness of childhood—for although clever and forward in education, Lucia was the perfect child—she related to Adelaide all the knowledge memory furnished her with in the history of her own mamma, with one exception. Any allusion to that was, with a tact beyond what most children of a larger growth

possess, religiously avoided. No one could better than Lady Adelaide, had she been acquainted with the truth, have appreciated the delicate unselfishness of this perpetual concealment on the part of a child, to whom her mother's death and the circumstances thereon attendant were ever the prominent point of her imagination; for poor Lucia never yet had, and in all probability never would, wholly recover the shock sustained in that too well remembered chamber. Manetta's remonstrances had but served to engraft it more deeply, and this self-enforced concealment did but add sharpness to the sting. We say self-enforced, because had Sister Agnese's warning never been spoken, Lucia's instinct would have equally silenced her in the presence of her father's wife.

Of her mother's beauty and goodness, her kindness to the poor, her love for church and country, and both of which Lucia so evidently shared, and how the cemetery of the Misericordia, outside Florence, was her resting-place, and of the frequent visits paid to the grave whenever a holiday or *fête* day at the convent afforded an opportunity, of the beauty of the said cemetery, and the hours spent there planting flower-roots on that dear grave, Lucia was never weary of conversing. But of papa, or nurse, or mamma's death, or in short any of the topics Sir Allen had dreaded an allusion might be made to, Lady Adelaide listened in vain.

"She is quite happy now," said the child, at the conclusion of the story, laying her head on Adelaide's knee; "and though I often say '*Requiescat in pace*,' Madre mia! it is more from love than because she needs my prayers. The saints in heaven don't want praying for, do they? and I do not wonder if my mamma went straight there the very night she died."

A pause ensued. It was broken by Adelaide's hesitating inquiry whether Lucia's mother had left directions for her to be educated in the Roman Catholic religion.

"Oh, no!" was the astonished answer. "Italy is my country, the Catholic Church my home. Mamma left no directions unless she told Manetta, or"—the child stopped short, and then continued. "But there was no need for directions; I was quite old enough to understand her last words, that I was to be sure always to love the Catholic Church better than anything else in the world; better than life itself; and I always will. Are you not a Catholic, mamma?" A look of sorrowful disappointment crossed Lucia's face at the reply. "But you will not try to make me give it up, or papa either; will you, mamma?" and she looked up pleadingly.

"I trust he will not, dearest," was Adelaide's first answer. For myself, after what you have told me, I should not think of interfering with your present faith."

There was a pause of some moments, and then Lucia, in reply to a deep sigh from Lady Adelaide, asked with timidity, half-fondly taking the sigher's hand within her own, whether anything were the matter?

"Nothing," murmured Adelaide, regarding her new charge with increased interest; and then added abruptly, "but I was thinking you are a happy child, Lucia, to have found Truth, or what, at all events, you *believe* to be Truth, at eleven years old."

"But why cannot you, who are twice as old as I am, find it, too, mamma, if you think it is such a happy thing?"

Adelaide shrugged her shoulders in true Parisian fashion. "Easier said than done, Lucia, when all its votaries are at loggerheads to discover the road thither," she replied. "I sometimes even doubt—but enough of this to-night, my child. We must not force that little

brain too far. You look already pale and head-weary; and these hands, why they are cold as ice, and you are trembling all over. What is the matter, child?"

"I heard a voice in the hall down stairs. I'm sure I did. Oh, mamma! let me go to bed? It is papa's. What shall I do? What shall I say to him? Let me go to bed?"

"No, dear; stay and speak to him. There is nothing to be afraid of."

"It is not so much *fear*," said Lucia, quickly, "but I cannot help remembering—I mean it reminds me of her—my poor dear dead mother." The tears were running down her face. "Oh dear, I must not let him see me cry. He cannot bear tears—it makes him so very angry; how silly I am. Hush! here he comes. I will hide myself behind the curtain, and dry my eyes."

She had hardly executed her purpose when Sir Allen entered the room, looking flushed and excited. He flung himself on the first chair at hand, having previously rung the bell to order wine and cigars. Of the former, to judge from appearances, he had already partaken pretty freely.

"Well, Lady Adelaide," yawned Sir Allen, as having established himself and decanters to perfect self-satisfaction, he had leisure to address his wife, "where is the young lady? Have you brought her home; and if so, why has she not the manners to wait up till I came in?"

"Here I am, papa," said Lucia, advancing bravely, now there was no way of escape. "How do you do, papa?" and she stood within a step or two of him, wishing and yet not venturing to go nearer till invited.

"Very well, thank you, Miss Lucia. I hope I see you well—though, upon my word, I can't say much for your appearance. Why, you are all eyes, and nothing else, child, and as thin as a whipping-post. The nuns have kept you

on short commons, I suppose, and put the perquisites into their pockets. Well, I should think you consider yourself pretty fortunate, on the whole, to get out of that confounded convent, Miss Lucia Mansfield."

"It was a very happy convent, indeed," was the warm reply, "and the nuns were all very kind to me," said the child.

"Oh, indeed, were they? What a curious coincidence—quite marvellous, upon my word. They didn't get fifty pounds a-year good English money for it, did they? That was altogether out of the question, was it not, my little lady? You don't seem to have lost your tongue there, at all events."

"Money can't buy love," said Lucia, nearly choked between fear of Sir Allen and eagerness to defend her convent friends.

"Don't contradict me, Miss Lucia, if you please. I have a great dislike to anything of the kind, especially from young people of your time of life. Money can buy everything, I tell you, and you'll find it out before you are many years older, to your cost, perhaps, as other folks have done before you."

"Come, Lucia, it is quite time for you to be in bed," put in Lady Adelaide, pitying the child from her heart, and yet for Lucia's own sake not interfering in the argument. "She is accustomed to retire at an earlier hour than this, by the doctor's desire," she added, addressing her husband. "He does not consider her by any means strong, and particularly forbade late hours."

"Let him be obeyed, in the name of all that is holy," said Sir Allen, with a whistle indicative of supremest indifference.

And at a wave of the hand, and "*buona notte*" from Adelaide, who wisely forbore any further demonstration of

affection in the presence of Sir Allen, Lucia ran up stairs to mamma's English maid, a thoroughly well-principled girl from one of the industrial schools in the neighbourhood of Haseldyne—who, unlike the run of ladies'-maids in general, holding it a point of honour to obey her mistress's directions to the letter, sat by Miss Lucia till she was fast asleep—notwithstanding the united attractions of supper, footmen, *politesse* and French valet admiration awaiting her below.

“Did you find any difficulty with her at the convent?” demanded Sir Allen, when Lucia had departed.

“None whatever; no child could have behaved better.”

“In your bright eyes, no doubt, my dear. I will venture to affirm that the young lady will not have been a month in your possession ere your new toy is looked upon as a model of human perfection, and taught, with the exception of your fair self, to consider every one around, Sir Allen included, immeasurably her inferior.”

“She will be taught nothing that would injure her,” replied Adelaide, haughtily, and with approaching disgust, as her husband, pouring out a second tumbler of wine, drained the glass at a draught; “but I confess it to be beyond my comprehension how any one—much less a father—can speak as you do both of and to an innocent and affectionate child.”

Sir Allen did not seem inclined to argue the point,—he lighted a cigar, and stepped out on the terrace. Tea and coffee shortly afterwards made their appearance, but went down again untouched by Sir Allen, who still appearing to prefer the society either of cigar or moonlit Arno to any other, Lady Adelaide felt at liberty to retire; and hastening up stairs, dismissed her maid, by this time really in want of her supper, while she, for many an hour after the accustomed one for repose, kept watch by Lucia's side,—quite unnecessarily, as far as the child was concerned, who, tired

with the day's excitement, slept well and soundly, nor missed the altar-lamp at the Chapel of The Annunziata, whose protecting radiance no longer shone upon her slumbers. Adelaide's prayers that evening were less formal than customary; a ray of sunshine had been suddenly darted in at her window,—a flower had budded beneath her tread to-day, the very same whose thorn had pierced Sister Agnese's footstep.

Both thorns and flowers had fulfilled their appointed task. Adelaide's spirit-garden needed the latter. It was provided,—and with a *Deo Gratias*, more foreign to her lip of late than Italy to her view, she at last sank to sleep. Sister Agnese's *Deo Gratias* that night was more placid—and less called for, might be urged; but then, be it remembered, she was a religious, and, in justice to her vocation, had no business whatever, come thorn, come flower, to grumble with God's will. A secular's rule is not so severe a one; it is far more elastic, and admits of occasional dispensation.

CHAPTER XVI.

“They built in marble—built as they
Who wished these stones might see the day
When Christ returns, and these dim walls
Might stand o’er them when Judgment calls.
Not that the shrines in grandeur built
Can do away the stains of guilt,
But witnesses they are of love,
Which only shall unfailing prove.”—WORDSWORTH.

“HAVE you seen all the Florence lions, *ma chère mère*?” asked Lucia next morning at their *tête-à-tête* breakfast-table.

“No, indeed; I have scarcely done any sight-seeing since we came here, a whole week since—a long time for English curiosity to keep at home; but your papa is always busy, and though more than one casual acquaintance have requested me to join their parties, the invitation has generally been refused. I am accused of being fastidious, Lucia, and candidly confess that sooner than accompany a party of mere sight-seers to these exquisite churches, and places, though less sacred, scarcely less interesting to a picture-idolator like myself, I would rather stay at home altogether. Ill-timed jests on the one hand, and common-place criticisms on the other, are more than enough to upset the very small stock of patience saved from our tour in Belgium, where shocks of this nature were of frequent occurrence.”

“What delicious news for little selfish me,” exclaimed

Lucia ; "because, now, you see, Lady Mamma, the post of head cicerone will fall to my lot ; though, for tiresome appearance' sake, we must also engage one of those most provoking of all men, a guide, to take one the longest way to every place, and spoil each word of pleasure and scrap of romance by jabbering *méchant* Italian at our elbows. I know how we will quiet him, though," and Lucia drew her purse out and shook it knowingly at Adelaide. "Something lies in here which can neither speak nor move, and yet can open and shut other people's mouths at will. That is an impromptu conundrum out of my very own head," said Lucia, with the air of a child six years old. "How stupid not to make you guess it before the purse popped out of my pocket, and give you the answer ;—but let us set off at once, mamma, in the cool of the morning."

"The hotel-master will soon procure a guide."

"May I go and ask him ?"

"The bell will do that for us, Miss Impatient, thank you ; and then to keep you quiet till the carriage is ready, for I am a great deal too idle for walking, suppose we form a programme of the day's occupations. Where does the head cicerone propose commencing operations ?"

"At the duomo or cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, as Catholics love best to call it ; afterwards the church of San Marco, and then the palaces and picture galleries, at our leisure. Florence is not seen in a day, or a week, I can assure you. The church of The Annunziata is one of the most beautiful, but I should like to go there on Sunday to High Mass, if you don't mind taking me, it is so well sung there, and you will be delighted ; unless—oh, I forgot—you will like to go to your own service on that day. I wonder whether I might go with the nuns and school-children. Do you think papa would object ?

"No need to ask him, Lucia. I always go to the Catholic Church when abroad."

"And papa, too?" inquired Lucia with interest.

Adelaide blushed. Sir Allen was *her husband* and Lucia's father. For both their sakes, independently of his, she felt ashamed to acknowledge that since the first week of their marriage, Sir Allen's footstep, except in the usual course of sight-seeing, had never crossed a church's threshold, whether Protestant or Catholic.

Lucia understood the blush, and immediately changed the subject, but with so much *naïveté* as to leave Adelaide with the impression of her hesitation not having been observed.

"How lovely," exclaimed the latter, as shortly afterwards they entered the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore—the pavement—Lady Adelaide's remark referred to—appearing to be literally strewn with lilies, real *bonâ fide* lilies, growing, as it were, from the stones beneath their feet, and forming a carpet, almost too delicate-looking for human foot to tread over.

"I thought you would admire this pavement, mamma; it seems to me as if Notre Dame des Fleurs had rained down a whole shower of lilies on her favourite church, to remind us of Him, the lily of Bethlehem,—and the child knelt down to kiss the pavement, over which the kaleidoscoped sunbeams from the window adorning the nave and chancel were brightly falling. She then rose and conducted Adelaide to the high altar beneath the dome. Simplicity and grandeur having vied with each other as to which should gain the victory, seemed to have settled the dispute by a mutual agreement not to interfere with either's individual claim on admiration, Adelaide advanced along the wide spiral-arched nave, her eye soon weary of gazing upward into the almost unreachable heights above; but on reach-

ing the dome itself,—declared to be of greater magnitude than that of St. Peter's, with its frescoed decorations and smiling magnificence of space and architecture,—Adelaide could no longer refrain from turning to Lucia with an expression of delight—but the child was prostrate before the altar, and on hearing Adelaide speak aloud, rose, finger on lip, and pointed to the tabernacle. A silver lamp suspended from the dome had warned her of the presence of One greater than the temple. The Baptistry, separated, doubtless in emblematic symbolism, a few yards from the cathedral, was the next point of interest.

“Are these the doors, my little Hand-book, Michael Angelo thought fit to be the gates of Paradise?” inquired Adelaide.

“They are indeed marvellously beautiful! The very same, mamma; though, grand as they are, I do not quite agree with Michael Angelo.”

“What a critic you are, child? Are you aware it is somewhat dangerous ground to venture on, thus to criticise these great people.”

“I am sure,” said Lucia, laughing, “I don't know how to criticise either great or little people. I'm not old or clever enough; but I dreamt about these doors one night after having spent some time the day before looking at them with Sister Agnese, who took us to this cathedral sometimes for a treat. I was standing on a high mountain a long way from here, but in the distance I could see Florence and the cathedral, and those wonderful gates Michael Angelo made so much fuss about; and I was thinking over his words, and what a small place Paradise must be if the entrance was no larger than this, when some one touched me on the shoulder, and whispering ‘Look round,’ turned me away from Florence; and oh, mamma! what do you think I saw? From one end of the sky to the other, stretching over

hundreds and hundreds of miles, were two gates. They seemed carved of transparent silver or mother-of-pearl, I scarcely know which, they were so dazzling, filled with niches just like these on the Baptistry doors, in which you see are placed statues of prophets, patriarchs, and Catholic saints; but instead of statues and busts, the niches of these gates I am telling you about were filled with angels—not carved angels, but real ones—holding golden harps, and looking down below as if their whole heart were fixed on something that was going on there; and as I was trying to see what they were looking at, all began to fade away like a dissolving view, and the same voice whispered in my ear, ‘Behold the gates of Paradise! Strive to enter in.’ I felt much too happy to be frightened, and whenever I see these doors those words always return to my mind; and that tall tower, that campanile standing close by and pointing up to heaven, seems, somehow or other, like the hand which touched me in my dream. You don’t call this criticising, mamma, do you?”

“No, not exactly, Lucia, I must acquit you of the charge. And now tell me, for I entirely forget, who built this said campanile. I can scarcely see the summit.”

“Giotto, to be sure—you naughty lady for not remembering. Look at the mosaics all over it; only the sun is so hot, you’ll get a headache if we stay now. They must wait for another day. Let us go back to the cool cathedral, and have one more look at the lilies before we leave.”

They stood admiring their painted loveliness, when Lady Adelaide’s attention, pointing her out to Lucia, was attracted by the proceeding of a little girl who had just entered the cathedral. Though evidently very poor, she was neatly and modestly dressed, and her clothes, from head to foot, scrupulously clean. Approaching the Lady Chapel,

situated in the left of the smaller domes forming the apse of the huge centre, and rendering the building cruciform, the child took off her bonnet, and laying it beside a covered basket, she drew therefrom a long white veil of common, though transparent, material ; having enveloped herself in which, and opened a prayer-book, she soon appeared wrapt in devotion.

" Another explanation, if you please, Lucia ?" demanded Adelaide in returning to the carriage. " What custom is this ?"

" I never saw it done before, mamma ; but believe there has been a confraternity established in Florence lately, consisting of little girls, who, as a reward for good conduct, strict truthfulness, and modest behaviour in particular, are allowed to wear this veil whenever they enter the cathedral church, either alone or with the rest of the confraternity."

Fra Angelico's frescoed paintings in the church and monastery of St. Marc were Adelaide's next treat.

" He may well have been said to converse with angels, and thus gained his name, or rather title, of Angelico," she observed to Lucia ; " his pictures convey to one's mind no other idea. The expression of the eye in most of his faces, those at least I am acquainted with, always appears to me one of such raptured ecstasy as none but an angel could imagine, or they who have conversed with them depicture. There is one of our English poetesses whose writings I must introduce you to some of these days, Lucia, who, in attempting to describe the aspect of the blessed in heaven, has beautifully said,

" ' They have grown white with gazing at God's throne.'

Fra Angelico's paintings might well have suggested the idea."

"But you have not seen Fra Angelico's best picture, mamma,—'The Last Judgment.' I call it my conversion picture. Would you like to know why? It is quite a long story."

"So much the better, your stories amuse me extremely. Let me hear what Fra Angelico's 'Last Judgment' could have had to do with your conversion. I didn't know Catholics believed in conversion at all, except from one religion to another."

"What, not from naughtiness and wickedness, mamma? How strange an idea. When Catholics have done wrong, they must be sorry, and begin goodness again. That is the conversion I mean."

"Oh, I understand; and now for the famous long story, Lucia."

"Well, you know, five or six years ago, before my own mamma died, I used to go as a day-scholar to the convent-school, and very often, when it was a festival, the nuns would invite me to spend the day there with the rest of the children. On my seventh birthday mamma had given me a beautiful doll—such a beauty, with wax arms and legs, and large blue eyes opening and shutting, just like a baby's; and I loved it quite as much—though perhaps you will laugh to hear me say so—as grown-up people love *their* little babies. Often in the night did I wake up to kiss my waxen baby as she lay by my side. Well, one day, it was the Feast of the Assumption, I went as usual to the convent. Among the *pensionnaires* was a little French girl called Elise. We were in the same class. She asked me to lend her the baby—we always called it the baby among ourselves. I did not at all like to trust her, for every one called her giddy Elise; but it seemed ill-natured to refuse, so I lent her my treasure for a few minutes while I went to give Mother Prioress a message from mamma. While I

was away, Elise, in running down the stone steps leading from the recreation-room to the garden, where she was going to take my baby for an airing, though I told her to wait till I returned, dropped the darling on the landing. She fell to the foot of the steps, and was broken into a thousand pieces!"

"Dear me!" said Adelaide, quite interested in the child's affection for her doll, "how grieved you must have been."

"Grieved!" I was nearly mad. I rushed into the garden, caught hold of Elise, who had hidden herself behind some of the trees, and dashed her to the ground. I felt for a moment I could kill her! Oh, was it not dreadful? Sister Agnese, on hearing Elise scream, came, with tears in her eyes, and took me into her cell, and talked like an angel; but I was not sorry, and did not choose to pretend. Besides, I felt proud of not being sorry, and when the Sister asked what I thought would become of me in the Day of Judgment if I gave way to such dreadful passion, I was more wicked than ever, for I said the Day of Judgment was nothing to me. All I cared about was my beautiful baby, and I would never forgive Elise for killing her. And Sister Agnese made no reply, but went and obtained Reverend Mother's permission to take me to see Fra Angelico's picture; so we went together: and one side of the picture made me feel sorry directly. I went home and kissed Elise, buried the poor waxen baby in my garden, and wore a black ribbon round my neck for a month afterwards—partly in sorrow for my doll, but more for having been so wicked. I always loved Elise from that time—we became great friends, and she has painted such a pretty scroll to hang over my bed. You have not seen it yet, mamma, but Sister Agnese promised to send it in a day or two with my other little treasures."

"And which side of the picture was the penitential one,

Lucia?" asked Adelaide, who had seen copies of "The Last Judgment" in England.

"Oh, the right side, to be sure; and the smile on *His* face—which seems reflected on that of the saints and angels who stand around. They look as if it were impossible to help smiling back for ever and ever, as He gazes down upon them. I do not like the other side of the picture at all, and wish the good brother Fra Angelico had never painted it. I do not believe the wicked souls will be punished in that way; and, besides, I should not like to be frightened into heaven, mamma."

"Lucia, my dear child," and Lady Adelaide shuddered, "how can you possibly tell in what way they will be punished?"

"No, I cannot, of course, *tell*—but I do not believe it. Neither do I believe, mamma, that hell is such an awful ugly place as people say. I hope it is not wrong, but I think, sometimes, it may very likely be as beautiful as Italy."

"My dear child, you shock me. Surely, you have been taught—I know you have—to believe in eternal punishment; and how, then, can you say this? How?—in what do you imagine it to consist? There would be small punishment, one would think, in living here for ever surrounded by all that is lovely. Tell me what you mean, Lucia?"

The little girl's face became pale as death, and her lips quivered as, looking up to the transparent Italian sky, she replied in a voice trembling with emotion, "What would Italy be without *God*?" Then, after a short pause, "Were you ever for a single moment very miserable, mamma, and all around was happy and beautiful? I don't want you to tell me—only it helps to explain my meaning. I remember that day I knocked Elise down in the garden, the flowers

even looked quite ugly, so did the sky, and though it was, oh! such a bright day, I hated the very sunshine, and wished some dark clouds would come and hide it; but when I came back from seeing the picture, and had kissed Elise, and forgiven her—never before had the trees and flowers, sky and sunshine, look half so beautiful! God had come back to them, mamma; He is their beauty. Without Him they are nothing but dazzling coloured ugliness. And to be separated from *Him*—to see His face on that dreadful day! to see at once—to hear the song of His saints and angels, as they fly away with Him, when all is over, and to long to pine to follow them as thirsty men pine for a drop of water—and then to stay behind—banished for ever! Oh! mamma, what matter if the place were ever so beautiful—it would still be hell—burning, scorching punishment!”

“Lucia,” asked Lady Adelaide, after a short consideration, “what did Sister Agnese say to your theory?”

“She said we must leave these things alone, as beyond our knowledge, and that we are not called upon to understand in what eternal punishment consists, but only to believe in its reality; at the same time, she pointed out to me, in a book belonging to her, some words expressing my own thoughts, only in rather a different manner. I will repeat them to you, they were very short: ‘To be without Jesus is a grievous hell—to be with Him a sweet paradise.’ But here we are at the Academy, mamma, and you will see the picture for yourself.”

And with the impression of Lucia’s words fresh in her mind, Adelaide stood before the masterpiece (may we not thus pronounce judgment?) of Angelico’s imagination. Nor was her own long unbiassed by the foregoing conversation, as that wondrous delineation of ecstasy and despair first elevated and then depressed her spirit. As far as its religious influence went, the darker view of the painter’s

subject appeared at least superfluous; for if, thought Adelaide, the representation of all that is most attractive to the spiritual nature of man fails to allure him heavenwards, of what avail is it to paint scenes of physical horror, such as these, in the hope of terrifying him into what the cold heart has already refused to enter—a heaven not worth his acceptance? “What a pity to hang such pictures as these,” said Adelaide, turning to “The Descent from the Cross,” by the same angel-guided hand, and then from another to another of Raphael, or equal inspirations in the vicinity,—“what a pity to hang these side by side with Cupids and Venuses, heathen gods and goddesses. We would shrink from doing the same with portraits of those whom we have loved on earth, and consider it next to desecration; if they are treasured up and gazed upon with holiest reminiscences, why not these? Look on that awful picture of ‘The Gethsemane Agony,’ and that pleading ‘Ecce Homo,’ encircled by three Fates,—Hercules and Fortune introducing Cosmos to Jove; and that questionable portrait of an unknown female immediately above. When will people learn good taste in religion, as in other matters? But now for the *Hôtel Impériale*,” turning to the guide, by courtesy, as Lucia had surnamed the speechless individual who, in admirable patience, had followed his two Italian *signorinas* about from church to church, and gallery to gallery, the last six hours, scarcely daring to approach, much less interfere with the head cicerone’s voluminous information, lest the promised reward for not speaking aloud the whole day, held out by Lucia, should be withheld,—“now for the hotel, or we shall be late for dinner, *cara mia*, and that will never do,” holding up her watch for the head cicerone’s inspection. “How the day has slipped away! You certainly don’t seem disposed to let time hang heavily on my hands, Miss Lucia. But who, in the name of all that

is extraordinary," she continued, as they re-entered the carriage, "are these wonderfully strange-looking figures in black hoods, shaking those little boxes for alms, as if they had no more tongues in their heads than you have allowed poor Lorenzo to make use of to-day ! It is marvellous how they can see at all through those immense hoods. And see their great glass eyes beneath, to increase the disguise ! How frightfully hideous ! They seem to have neither head nor face."

"Haven't they, though ?" was the enthusiastic answer ; "ugly or not ugly, heads and faces, or no heads and faces, I wish everyone wore as good a heart beneath their dress as those good brethren of the *Misericordia*. They belong to one of the most noble institutions our 'Florence the Beautiful' prides her fair self on being queen of. They were first founded, these good brothers, in the time of the plague which desolated our Florence some centuries ago, and changed the 'City of the Lily' into a grave. Your face says go on, mamma, and I shall only just have time to finish before we reach home. Well, in the midst of this dreadful plague, when men lay dead or dying in the very streets, because no one dare carry them home or lay their tainted bodies in the grave, a few brave and holy men banded themselves for this desperate work, and vowed a solemn vow, to go, for the love of God, wherever suffering or death should call them ; and when the plague ceased, and its victims no longer needed their assistance, the brethren of the *Misericordia* resolved still to remain together, as the servants and protectors of the poor, the sick, the suffering, and unfortunate."

"That really is beautiful, Lucia ; but why need they wear those dismal sable robes and those glass spaces for their eyes ?"

"Merely because they wish to be hidden from the

applause of the world, and even from each other. It is quite possible the heart of a prince may beat under one of those dismal sable robes, as you call them, mamma; and, it is reported, the Grand Duke himself belongs to the order, though no one can be certain who does or who does not. Wealthy noblemen and poor men work side by side. Many a father and son even, who are both brethren of the *Misericordia*, are unaware of the other's, being a member. Their great aim is to avoid recognition, and to shun praise here, lest they lose it hereafter. The way they are assembled is the following:—Whenever an accident happens in the street, the brethren are summoned by sound of a bell; and when its warning voice is heard, the gay young nobleman glides unnoticed from the ball-room, or the citizen from his account-book—or if in the night, from their beds—slip on the disguise, and then offer their assistance in whatever work of mercy may be needed—either carrying the sick to the hospital, or waiting there to assist the surgeons and nurses, fetching the sick man's friends to his side, conveying a friendless corpse to its last home, and seeing the children of the deceased educated and cared for. Some of them visit the prisons, and remain constantly in prayer, or by the side of those condemned to die; others, again, are employed, as we saw to-day, in collecting alms for the support of the society. But they never speak, and only excite attention by rattling a box before the passers-by. It quite startles me sometimes, when walking; but the poorest seldom refuse their mite to the brethren, they are so universally beloved. I have not told you the more engaging part of their work, which is to visit the dying, read to them, and assist the priest in the arrangement of the altar, for the more devout administration of the last sacraments. Sister Agnese told me she had often gone into a poor garret, or cellar, and found in one corner of it a little

table, made for the time into an altar, upon which wax tapers were burning, and flowers arranged, against the arrival of the priest. You know, *Madre mia*, we Catholics always think the sweetest and fairest flowers should be presented to Him, who Himself created their wondrous beauty, and is fairer than all when He comes to visit us in the Adorable Sacrament."

"Yes, I know that, Lucia. It is the part of your faith I most admire. That realization of the Presence of God, and the ingenious, child-loving modes of paying Him homage, that realization seems thus fertile to invent. It is not the externals in themselves that attract me, but the faith of which they are so evidently the natural offspring. They who abuse you look merely at the flowers, the lights, the incense, the embroidered garment, and not at the principles these involve. This, at least, strikes me is the real secret of the unconcealed sneer of one, the accusation of theatrical display of another, and the almost universal decision Protestants have arrived at of your worship being, to say the least, overdone."

"Overdone, mamma? Is it possible then to overdo our love to God?"

Adelaide gave the same graceful but most expressive shrug used on a former occasion, and Lucia went on.

"It always seems to me," she said, "that the grandest services, the most perfect music, the richest flowers, painting, or needle-work, Italy or any other country can produce, are quite underdone when offered to Him. Why, mamma, we are not afraid of overdoing our love for one another, are we?"

Lady Adelaide was still silent, and Lucia, who was getting accustomed to her step-mother's frequent fits of abstraction, concluded her remarks more in soliloquy than conversation, by observing, "that for her part, she

often thought God had overdone His love to us, and that, therefore, supposing it were possible—which she did not believe it was—for us to overdo ours for Him, it were but common justice, after all—only returning love for love.”

Sir Allen was again absent from the dinner-table, “which was provoking enough,” Lucia observed; “because had they known of his intention not to dine at home that day, they might have remained longer at the Academy, and even visited the Boboli Gardens, not far distant, and sat beneath the shady avenues till sunset. Would mamma like to make up for lost time by driving to the Cascine in the evening? No place in Florence afforded more field for amusement. Every one went. It was quite ‘the thing,’ only ladies must not leave their carriages unescorted, as that was not considered quite *comme il faut*.”

Adelaide smilingly acquiesced in the proposal, inquiring, at the same time, how Lucia had become possessed of so much fashionable etiquette.

“From the nuns, to be sure,” was the reply. “They said that as we children would for the most part have to live in the world by-and-by, we must learn how to behave when we got there.”

The Cascine—the Hyde Park of fair Florence—was, owing to the evening being a particularly cool one for the season, more crowded than usual; not only everybody, but “everybody’s everybody, having turned out to-night,” as Lucia, laughing at the little conceit, exclaimed to Adelaide on arriving there. Whole regiments of gaily-dressed ladies, English, French, Italian, interspersed here and there with one whose black mantilla and unmistakeable bearing bespoke her more western country, were driving, riding, or promenading up and down, with their attendant gentlemen, on the broadly-terraced plains nature had here bountifully provided for their amusement; while the Arno, that most

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The Cascine—the Hyde Park of fair Florence—was, owing to the evening being a particularly cool one for the season, more crowded than usual; not only everybody, but “everybody’s everybody, having turned out to-night,” as Lucia, laughing at the little conceit, exclaimed to Adelaide on arriving there. Whole regiments of gaily-dressed ladies, English, French, Italian, interspersed here and there with one whose black mantilla and unmistakeable bearing bespoke her more western country, were driving, riding, or promenading up and down, with their attendant gentlemen, on the broadly-terraced plains nature had here bountifully provided for their amusement; while the Arno, that most

companionable of all rivers, peeping in on all occasions, and never unwelcome, flowed in bridal gladness at their feet. Flower-girls offering huge camelias and crimson roses for sale; boys fishing, with their nets tied to long poles, in the river, chattering and hushing each other in the same breath, as a larger prize than ordinary met their view and was supposed worth the self-denial of a moment's silence to secure, enlivened the scene. Several of Lady Adelaide's English acquaintances greeted her as the carriage passed at foot-pace along the course, and then remarked to their companions, as Adelaide, after returning their bow, or perhaps pausing for a few moments' conversation, desired the coachman to drive on, "What an exceedingly proud, unsociable person Lady Adelaide had become since her marriage. She used to have plenty to say for herself at one time, but never appeared now to care for old friends. Marriage made some people so selfish—wrapped up in their own happiness, they considered themselves at liberty to ignore the rest of the world. Who could that dark-eyed Italian child be by Lady Adelaide's side? Could it be, they wondered, Sir Allen's little girl by his first marriage—the one he had been accused of neglecting and had immured in a convent to avoid bringing to England? How stupid—of course it was she—who else could it be? He had, doubtless, come to Florence on purpose to see her."

How ill-natured the world was to set abroad such reports about a generous, good-hearted fellow like Sir Allen. As to the poor little child herself, they sincerely pitied her, with that cold, haughty Lady Adelaide for a step-mother; she looked half-frightened to death, as it was, with her pale face and unnaturally large sad-looking eyes, which appeared almost afraid to look one in the face; and they should not think the present Lady Mansfield's society much calculated to embolden her Italian step-daughter. Proud women

make bad step-mothers, unless kept well under by their husbands; and they should not imagine that easy-tempered Sir Allen was much of a man to keep any woman in order—much less a Lady Adelaide. She would have her own way, and the poor child would be obliged to make the best of it.

The unconscious objects of these animadversions were meanwhile pursuing their way most contentedly, indulging in many a gay though not ill-natured remark on the passers-by, for proud people are, at least, not gossiping ones; they do possess that *one* virtue, of indifference to their neighbours' affairs others are humble enough to be so busy about. Having arrived at the end of the more frequented portion of the Cascine, Lucia proposed driving on a mile or two. They were about to carry the plan into execution, when, on throwing a parting glance towards the brilliant promenade, along which the foot wanderers were sauntering, Lady Adelaide's eye caught sight of her husband. He was conversing very earnestly, and with more than the air of mere acquaintanceship with a handsome, elegantly-dressed Englishwoman, who, with an expression of deepest interest, was looking up into his face. The band at this moment struck up the French national air, "*Partant pour la Syrie.*"

Sir Allen, with a smile (how well did that recall to Adelaide her Haseldyne wooer's devotion to herself), offered his arm. It was instantly accepted, and the two friends turned in the direction of the fair Arno's waters, as though anxious to escape from the immediate bustle around.

"Drive on more quickly," said Adelaide in a tone intended, as her tone to those beneath her seldom failed, to be gentle and polite, but at which, in the present instance, Andrew started, so different in its harshness did it sound to that commonly used by her ladyship in giving him directions. "Do you hear me?" continued Adelaide, as

the man, in his surprise, only half obeyed her commands by urging the horses into a quicker trot. "Drive on more quickly, Andrew; how dull you are to-night! Put them to their full speed," and clasping her arm tightly round Lucia's tiny waist, Adelaide drew her treasure more closely towards her; while the Italian child, always ready to respond with threefold ardour to any demonstration of affection, bent her head down upon Lady Adelaide's shoulder, loading her, as they drove along, with all the endearing epithets the expressive language of her country is so fertile to invent. The moon had risen ere Sir Allen Mansfield's carriage once more rattled over the streets of Florence, for Adelaide was in a driving mood to-night, and Lucia, nothing loth to the long astronomical meditation mamma's silence left her ample leisure to bring to a satisfactory conclusion by the time they arrived at the Hôtel Impériale.

Whatever attractions the Cascine might have in the opinion of Florentine visitors, past, present, and to come; whatever fascinations its Arno-washed banks might possess in the eyes of Sir Allen Mansfield, to whom from this evening forward the gay promenade appeared to have become the daily centre of interest, amusement, and time-killing, nothing is more certain than this, that to one English lady in Florence, the plains of the Cascine, its promenade and terrace, were henceforth invisible; for not once, during the course of her long visit to Florence *la belle*, did they from that evening forth, even in distant perspective, again appear in view.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Love is ever praying,
Nor doth count the chime."—WILLIAMS.

AFTER the following Sunday's High Mass at the Church of the Annunziata, great was Lucia's happiness on a proposal, she had scarcely liked to venture upon herself, being made by Adelaide to revisit the convent, at which hospitable abode nothing would do but that an early dinner should form the prelude to a long afternoon's recreation, to be spent examining the frescoes and other points of interest in the adjoining cloisters, under the auspices of Sister Agnese; who, with her bright face beaming with delight, conveyed the Reverend Mother's message to the parlour, making the latter's apologies to Adelaide for being at present prevented, by the illness of one of the novices, from enforcing it in person.

"It needs little enforcing, to judge from somebody's eyes, Sister Agnese, does it? There, Lucia, fly off to the garden till dinner is ready. I fancy certain small figures in the distance, with their nod and beck and wreathed smile, will soon put poor grown-up mamma in the background. What a sweet child you have made of her, dear Sister Agnese!" she continued, turning to the nun with no little affectionateness of manner. "I never before met a child of her age so thoroughly well educated and full of information."

"She is a darling," was the simple reply; "but it is not I who have made her so, madame. You must not give me praise I do not deserve."

"But are you not then Lucia's instructress these last four or five years?"

"Not the sole one, madame; another of the sisters shares my labours in the care of these little ones; and our Mother herself spends all the time she is able to spare from other duties in the school-room."

"Well then, from your account, sister, it seems to me I must divide my gratitude, instead of bestowing it in one direction. There is more than enough in my heart for all three, I can assure you. And now, if it be no breaking of rule, and you will not think it impertinent, dear sister, may I ask one or two questions respecting yourself?"

"Certainly, madame; no question our holy rule permits us to reply to is ever considered an impertinence."

"That being the case then, Sister Agnese, I was about to express my amazement how it is possible for one so young as yourself, and"—glancing up at the rose-tinted cheek and polished brow, barely concealed beneath the Ursuline coif above—"so possessed of all that can render life attractive, can consent voluntarily to enter upon an existence, so, to use the mildest term, secluded and monotonous as that of a religious house. I can perfectly understand you, and others of the same age, enjoying the novelty for a year or two, perhaps, while those more advanced in life, doubtless, find here repose from the turmoil and disappointment"—the speaker sighed on uttering the last word—"a long acquaintance with the world may probably bring along with it; but calmly to sit down, in the very midst of youth and"—she was about to add beauty, only fearing to vex the sister, she stopped short, and changed it to "happiness—with a determination to be shut up here for the next fifty years, possibly—that I confess is a species of courage which, did I not see it demonstrated before my very eyes, no second-hand information could induce me to believe in."

"But madame is mistaken in supposing our life to be a monotonous one," answered the sister, with a smile at once gay and earnest; "on the contrary, it is one of continual change—of increasing interest——"

"But interest in *what*?" inquired Lady Adelaide.

"Will madame permit me to answer one question by asking another?" inquired the nun. "Is there any one in the world—parent, sister, friend, or brother—whom madame has ever deeply loved?"

Adelaide's thoughts flew back to Haseldyne, St. Clair, and her childhood's, girlhood's, womanhood's passionate idolatry; could any love be deeper?

"Madame must forgive me," murmured Sister Agnese gently, seeing her visitor's hesitation, and fearing that by an ill-timed question she might have given pain; "I did but seek to illustrate my meaning. I fear it was overbold."

"Not at all, sister—not at all. I was but thinking who among my many friends could best lay claim to your description. I remember now, and can reply to you. There is that *one* you speak of; one deeply loved,—loved beyond all others. I allude to a brother."

Why did Adelaide recoil from the idea of the simple nun's more likely supposition, unless pre-informed as to the speaker's husband being the cherished one spoken of? What real difference could it make whether a secluded nun in a foreign convent thought her a happy wife, or otherwise? To judge from the Ursuline's manner, Adelaide's explanation was a matter of little moment, and had passed unobserved. The peculiarly emphatic intonation laid on the word *brother* may have caused a moment's surprise in the breast of the religious; but monks and nuns being proverbially Jesuitical, *alias* deceitful to the verge of dishonesty, the one in question took no more notice of Adelaide's informa-

tion than to continue her argument, observing that in this case madame could better understand her poor illustration, "for you never found *his* society—the presence of him you loved so dearly—monotonous, lady, did you?" she continued; "or, at all events, it was a monotony so gladsome, you would often fain have had it prolonged."

Lady Adelaide shaded her eyes from the sun; she had but now discovered the heat too much for her.

"And," continued the religious, in a tone whose wistful tenderness sank into the listener's heart, "would it be no daily interest, think you, lady, to persuade others to care for that loved one as well as yourself?—to know that in case of your absence, or sickness, or death, he would still be loved by them,—not deserted or forgotten? His interests their interest; his children, his friends, dear to the apple of their eyes, as they have been to your own; his mother, one whom, alas, you know to have been, through her love to him, for many a year heavily bowed down, heart-broken, in her griefs as tenderly cared for—as precious to them as to yourself she ever has been? Would there be no interest, think you, in securing this—in helping by your exertions, day by day, to make more sure of it? And then, as to *time*, madame. What cares *love* for time? as you well know. Love has but one hour, and fifty—seventy—a hundred—nay, a thousand years, have not exhausted one little second of its fulness. Come now, madame," said the sister more gaily, and with a sort of coaxing enthusiasm, "do let me persuade you to acknowledge the possibility of a Catholic convent not being so dull and miserable a place as you had imagined. It will be quite a boast for me in recreation time, if I am able to tell of having been fortunate enough to get an English lady to acknowledge this much."

"Pray let me confer that honour upon you then," said

Adelaide, as at the sound of the dinner-bell Sister Agnese rose to obey the summons. "I can well believe, after listening to your pretty allegory, that the life you have chosen, far from being devoid of interest, may be, under certain circumstances, one of unmitigated happiness."

"Not quite that, either," pondered the young religious, as with folded arms she crossed the corridor between the parlour and children's refectory. "These English ladies are always in extremes; one must be either supremely happy or altogether miserable. There may be clouds even in a convent life some times, may there not, Lucia?" she exclaimed, as the little girl, fresh from a race with Elise, ran caressingly up to her darling mistress. "Cloudy days will come sometimes, won't they? especially when cruel mammas run away with pupils naughty nuns have been silly enough to make pets of. But hush, here is the refectory. Silence, my children!"

"Whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do,"—"Do all to the glory of God," responded some twenty little voices, as making each the sign of redemption, they assembled around the table, and the like ordinary meal-time silence being dispensed with on Sundays, resumed their animated conversation.

"Would your mamma like you to dine with her in the parlour, or here, *cara mia*?" inquired Sister Agnese, as Lucia was about to take her usual seat.

"Why here, to be sure, you dear naughty sister for asking such a question. Is she not coming too? Let me go and fetch her. She will like it of all things; indeed she will," as Sister Agnese shook her head doubtfully. "Ah, there, see my words coming true," exclaimed Lucia, as Adelaide, leaning on the arm of the Reverend Mother, entered the refectory.

"Well, my little ones," said the latter, as they rose to

greet their superior, "what is the last news from Asia? One would think you were settling the affairs of the world, to listen to those busy tongues. Let us see, now, how warmly you can welcome an English lady to Italy. No more Italian for to-day. Lady Mansfield is no doubt anxious to ascertain which among you is the best English scholar. What, all silent!" as the children looked shyly one from the other, and very wishfully at Adelaide, evidently longing, yet no one liking, to put herself first forward in obeying the half-jesting injunctions.

"I have no doubt we shall soon be excellent friends, Reverend Mother," said Adelaide, as she accepted Sister Agnese's offered seat. "It is, indeed, kind thus to make me at home with you all. I was quite afraid of asking your permission to dine here; it might be against the rule of the convent. I had been informed, somewhere or other, that in a religious house we are excluded usually from the meals of the community."

"The information was perfectly correct, madame, our meals being equally religious both in intention and observance with the rest of our employments. The community, by universal custom, always take them alone and in silence; but these little ones are quite secular enough, I assure you, to render any dispensation from a similar obligation wholly unnecessary. And since madame is good enough to prefer their noisy society to what," said the old lady smiling, "she was pleased to term 'a state dinner alone,' nothing gives me greater pleasure than to welcome her amongst them. My child," addressing Sister Agnese, "the sisters await your coming in the upper refectory. I will myself do the honours of our *pensionnaires'* table this morning."

After the merry dinner party, for in spite of the Mother's threat as to no more Italian being spoken, few tongues remained long silent, roars of laughter being the result of all

trying to talk English in unison, and Lucia having introduced to her new mamma's especial notice the waxen baby's cruel murderess, Mademoiselle Elise, a visit to the cloisters followed, under the chaperonage of sister Agnese, who, having related to Adelaide for the first and to Lucia for the hundredth time, the tales and legends connected with the principal frescoes, almost all executed by Andrea del Sarto, when in extremest poverty, and working for the most miserable remuneration, pointed out in pride his *chef d'œuvre* painted over the door leading from the nuns' cloister into the church beyond—the celebrated “Madonna del Sacco,” thus named from the unfortunate artist's being paid a sack of wheat only for its execution. “Hard work, was it not, madam?” said the nun, who never save with a look of compassion repeated the oft-told tale of Del Sarto's grinding poverty. “But little matter now, poor Andrea! He is buried here, madam, beneath this stone,”—as, on entering the church, she led the way towards his grave. “See how fine a monument posterity has erected to his memory. Why, the cost of this would have kept him and his from many a long weary day's hunger and starvation. Well, God rest your soul, poor Andrea, and feed you with better bread than a hard world had to bestow. ‘Fidelium animæ per misericordiam Dei requiescant in pace;’” and the nun passed on. “This picture, madam, is considered the gem of our church. The painter's name is unknown, and tradition has in consequence decreed the praise to invisible hands,” remarked the sister, turning to the picture of the Annunciation, supposed to be endowed with miraculous power. “It is seldom exposed, excepting on great festivals, and during the octave of the Annunciation. But I fear, madam, it will be necessary for me to leave you: Vespers will commence at four, and the children have to be in their seats a few moments previously. You will, therefore, excuse

me. Addio, madam. God be with thee, my little Lucia ;" and without waiting for the child's embrace, lest the second parting should recall painful remembrances to Lucia's mind, and thus tend to sadden both herself and the kind English lady who so evidently loved the darling, sister Agnese departed.

The evening was spent by our Florentine friends in visiting the church of Santa Maria Novella, or La Sposa, as Michael Angelo called the church he longed to wed.

Sir Allen was never visible in Florence on Sundays. He always rode over early in the morning to some villa in the neighbourhood of Fiesole, where one or two old friends of his mother's family, he informed Lady Adelaide, resided, returning to Florence late in the evening of the following day. No dinner, therefore, that most tyrannical of household gods, being in the way, and a "comfortable cup of tea" having well supplied its place, Lady and Miss Mansfield, escorted by Lorenzo, and in company of many another with face bent in the same direction, wended their way towards La Sposa.

"It is the Exposition," whispered Lucia, as they reached the door, and then as Adelaide would have inquired further, putting finger on lip in token of silence. The scent of flowers was all but overpowering as the porch was passed, and the bridal church, in all her loveliness, opened upon the view ; orange-blossom, myrtle-bough, and shrubs abounding in the vicinity of Florence, were scattered in every aisle ; while the altar, shaded by crimson curtains from the still bright glare of daylight from without, was literally emblazoned in the radiance shed from innumerable tapers, intermixed with the labyrinth of tall flowering citron tree, or more diminutive plants around. And whence all this unwonted splendour, and to whom dedicated ? Let the

crowd of, silent worshippers reply. There are enough, though none to spare: Many a Magdalene, loving much; many a Peter, weeping bitterly; many a beloved disciple, not forgetful of the broken-hearted legacy intrusted to his care; many a little one, not forbidden to come thither; many a sorrowful one; many a rejoicing; many another, poor in this world yet rich in faith: yea, many to answer the inquiry; but not all, alas! The scoffers were not wanting here, any more than of old at Calvary; and what marvel. It was not the first time that He who sat there enthroned in His meek majesty, waiting patiently, lovingly, the adoration of His children, and enduring, with silent humility, the slights and indignities of the scorers who denied His omnipotence, had been thus insulted. This was not the first time He had been despised and rejected of men; not the first time He had come to dwell among them, to pity and to heal. No, nor the first or hundredth He had been bidden by those who with carnal eye discerned not His divinity, to "come down from the cross," and let them see whether He were the Christ or no. There were mockers here, as once in coward Pilate's presence, at the fireside of the judgment-hall, that cold bleak night a while ago, and up and down proud Herod's palace; but, thanks be to God, they were among the few.

There was a crowd in the street outside as our visitors departed. Not a noisy or tumultuous one, but still, to all intents and purposes, a crowd; why gathered would be difficult to say—a crowd gathering on the most trivial excuse not being a less uncommon occurrence in Italy than elsewhere.

As Lorenzo, now really of use, and at liberty to gesticulate to his heart's content, made way for his ladies, with no little dexterity, through the centre of it, Lucia, holding

Lady Adelaide's hand, fancied some one pressed more closely than the rest up to the opposite side, and tried to reach the pocket of her dress. The child's first impulse was to feel for her purse; but remembering she had left it at home, and had nothing of any value about her person except a small jewelled brooch, the property of her dead mother, confining the lace-tie at her neck, she changed her intention, and having ascertained the little ornament's security, thought no more of the matter till the next day at luncheon-time, when, on drawing out her handkerchief, something, with a jingling sound of money, fell heavily to the ground.

"What, in the name of fairyland, can this be?" she exclaimed, stooping down, and then holding up a leathern purse of Florentine workmanship to Adelaide's inspection. "Why," peeping in and emptying the contents on the table, "it is filled with gold, mamma; English money, too, as well as Italian. How very, very wonderful. I never had so much in my life before. The nuns only allowed us to keep a few solda at a time for *bon-bons* or toys, and see, here is a downright fortune. Ah, I know who did it!" she exclaimed, springing up and throwing her arms round Adelaide's neck. "I know who it is, you wicked, spoiling thing. You knew this was my birthday, and so put all this money in my pocket while I was asleep. Maud told me you sat by my bedside till nearly two o'clock this morning, reading that book I bought for you the other day. Ah, mamma, you are too kind, and are spoiling me; and if you don't take care, I shall grow like a certain French lady Elise once knew, who was so overpowered with riches, and jewels, and grand friends, that she not only grew weary of her own life, but managed somehow to make every one who came near her weary of theirs."

"That reproach may at least be spared to me on account

of your purse, Miss Lucia," replied Adelaide, greatly entertained, "for whatever lesser sins may be laid to her charge, somebody's mamma has a little bit more discretion than to load a giddy puss like yourself with all that money. It is enough to buy you a wedding *trousseau* some ten or fifteen years to come."

"But, mamma," continued Lucia, far too thunder-struck for amusement, "where do you think it has come from?"

"From the nuns, perhaps," suggested Adelaide.

"Oh, the poor dear nuns—not they, indeed. I know for a fact they have more than enough to do with every sixpence of their money already. The convent of the Annunziata is not a rich one by any means; and were you to see the heaps of poor people who come begging there for food and clothing, you would not think they had silver, much less gold, to waste on a little girl like me. Besides, of course they know papa and you have plenty of money: English ladies and gentlemen always have, have they not? So Manetta told me, at least; and that they spent it as free as water when they came abroad, and then sent back to England for more. She often said how much she would like to possess a few hundreds of the money she'd seen them lavish away, for she'd be a fine lady then for a year or two, and roll about in a carriage, instead of slaving for her living. Manetta was always wishing to be a fine lady. I wonder what has become of her now. She was very kind to me, and——"

The sentence was left unfinished, and Adelaide started. Sir Allen's warning had been forgotten, though not wilfully; but it was time to put his wishes in practice as regarded the person the child alluded to.

"Lucia," she said, bringing out the words hurriedly and as if wishing to get over a disagreeable task, "if it is

your old nurse you were speaking of just now, I wish for many reasons, dear child, you never to mention her name again. It is not in my power to tell you exactly why, but Lucia will trust me."

"Of course, dear mamma," was the reply of one trained in unquestioning obedience to the voice of a superior—whether, as in the present case, a kind and gentle one, or otherwise. "I will never mention her again if you do not wish it but——"

"Well, dear, go on. But what?"

"I only meant to say that though she was sometimes un—— I mean, that though she had one or two faults, she never taught me any harm."

"I can well believe it, my child," said Adelaide, gazing fondly into the upturned face from which, spite of its almost unnatural sadness, the first soft down of unconscious innocence had never been effaced. "It is possible I may have been unjustly prejudiced about this person—this poor nurse of yours; but let us talk about the purse," she continued, thankful to change the theme. "Let me look at it more closely. Why, what is this?" as, on shaking out a few remaining coins Lucia in her surprise had left behind, a slip of paper fell out alongside.

"There is something written on it. Look here," pushing the paper across the table. "Read the words out loud, please. Oh, make haste!" cried the child getting every minute more excited; "I cannot make them out." They were written in bad Italian, and the hand evidently a feigned one.

Lady Adelaide did as desired, and as much to her own as to Lucia's astonishment read as follows:—

"The wages of sin restored to the innocent. Let the innocent plead, whether living or dead, for the guilty."

The mingled feelings of pity, dismay, and awe written on both reader's and listener's face might have formed fitting

study for a painter. Neither spoke, till Lucia, gathering up the money with the intention of replacing the mysterious coins in the purse, once more said, with frightened solemnity,—

“Do not let us talk about it, mamma, except to *Him*—and—but, ah! you do not speak to *Her*, and yet how glad her heart must be to look at that money, and remember that on the Cross it eased His suffering to think of its being sent back.”

“But have you really no possible idea who it can be?” said Lady Adelaide, her curiosity by no means thus easily satisfied, or rather quenched, as appeared the case with her little girl.

“No, indeed, not the least; except that I remember last night, in the crowd, I fancied some one tried to put their hand in my pocket, and thought at first it might be a thief, till I recollected there was no money there to steal, so did not even put my hand down.”

“But that does not the least disperse the mystery, Lucia. Are you not in a fever to know whose the unknown hand could have been, supposing your fancy to be a correct one?”

“No,” said the little girl sadly; “I do not care to find out now, because whoever the sender of the money may be, they wish to be concealed; and besides, it is not a happy gift, you see. I thought at first some one had sent me a present, and it would have been such fun to find them out. Once I thought it must be papa,—I did really; would not that have been nice? It would have proved that after all he perhaps—loved me,” was the coming word, and though not spoken, Adelaide comprehended. “But now,” continued the little speaker, “I do not think I should like to find out the sender,—guilty is such a terrible word; and innocent—ah!” and she shook her head, “they don’t

know about Elise and the doll-story, or they would not call me innocent; innocent means never to have done wrong—doesn't it?"

Adelaide's head drooped over her plate. If Lucia was not innocent, what were others?

"No, mamma; I have quite settled it now. I do *not* want to find out any more about the money, for I could not bear to *hear* any one call me innocent and themselves guilty. It is quite bad enough to read, without hearing the person speak it; all I have to do is to pray for the dear sender, and give the whole purse and all to the poor."

"I do not exactly see the necessity of that either, Lucia; you are under no sort of obligation to give the whole away, though I quite approve of your wish to spend some in charity. It strikes me, on reflection, that the restorer may very possibly be one who has robbed your family in days gone by, and now wishes to make restitution; and therefore you are fully entitled to spend the stolen money as you will. Suppose, then, you give half away in the manner you mention, and reserve the remainder of it for yourself."

"Not one solda, mamma; please don't desire me. I see how kindly you mean; but indeed, indeed, it would give me no pleasure; though there are many things I should like to buy in Florence, I would rather a thousand times go without them for ever than spend one halfpenny of this in their purchase. Do you not remember, mamma, what it is called? —'the wages of sin.' It *must* be given to the poor, or the Church," added she vehemently, "and then it will become the wages of sorrow."

"The wages of humbug rather, Miss Lucia, I should be inclined to say," muttered a voice by her side. "What is all this folly about?"

The child shrieked and begged pardon simultaneously.

"But you frightened me so papa," she apologized. "I did not know any one had come into the room."

"Then learn another time not to be taken by surprise, little idiot," said Sir Allen, drawing a seat to the table a short distance from Lucia; "and now, in the name of all the saints and the queen of them, whom I suppose you are accustomed to swear by, Miss Lucia, of the Annunziata, may I presume to ask what you are doing with this money?" and with one sweep he placed the glittering heap beyond her reach. "What was it I caught you saying just now?"

"What?"

"Oh, the wages of this, and wages of that, and poor people, and churches, and a deal more convent cant, which the sooner you get rid of the better."

"Now, papa," and Lucia tried hard to speak affectionately, even coaxingly, "don't tease me, and I will tell you all about it, and the wonderful way it came into my pocket; but please give me back the money first, and let me put it safely away in this pretty purse; because it does not really belong to me, and must therefore be taken greater care of."

"To whom does it belong then, you little goose, and how came it here?"

"I don't know any more than you, papa, indeed; I don't indeed," as he gave her an unbelieving look. "A stranger put it into my pocket. We are quite as much puzzled as yourself to guess who it can be. I only discovered the purse a few moments back."

"But what then do you mean by asserting it is not yours, if some one had the politeness, and foolery into the bargain, to hand it over in the way you tell me?"

"Why, *there* is the reason, papa," and she held out the slip of paper.

Sir Allen took it, and having read the words, burst into a laugh, long, loud, and scornful. "Upon my word, these

poor priest-ridden wretches half-amuse and half-provoke one," he at length ejaculated. "This is what I suppose they call a 'grand penitence.' He or she — she, I should imagine, for no man would be so great a fool — has been to confession in some unusual panic of conscience, and has been drilled by her director into this piece of poetical nonsense. One of those rascally servants who used to rob me right and left when I was here before, and green enough to be taken in by their Italian flourishing, no doubt, suddenly transformed into a piety-stricken sentimentalist. Heaven and earth ! what next ? 'Let the innocent plead for the guilty.' Dear me, how sweetly pretty ; almost worthy of Dante ;" and stretching his arms out, Sir Allen leaned back in the chair, and indulged in a long yawn. "Well, Miss Lucia," he resumed, watching the eager glance from time to time cast towards her treasure, "this good lady's or gentleman's fit of remorse is all the better for you and me, *n'est-ce pas ?* It, as it really happens, occurs most opportunely. I am particularly hard up for the needful at the present moment, and by your little ladyship's leave, will place this penitential, and by no means despicable, sum at my bankers'. You will be glad to help papa, no doubt, now you have the opportunity, and prove to him how well the 'good nuns,' " and he mimicked Lucia's voice, "have conducted your education. Now pray don't begin to blubber, child ; you are quite welcome to two or three pounds," and he pushed the sum mentioned towards her, "for your gimeracks and nonsense ; only remember, it is not to be spent in the way I heard you talking of just now. I tell you, once for all, I mean to have none of that rubbish. Spend it upon yourself, and as much more as you want. Here, I will make it five pounds. No girl of your age need fret for pocket-money, whenever you choose to ask your father for it, always, however, with the above proviso. It shall not be :

wasted on religious humbug. I look to you, my dear, to see these directions complied with;" and he turned to the window, whither at the beginning of the discussion Lady Adelaide had retired; but his wife had quitted the apartment. Determined to maintain her self-control in Lucia's presence, and feeling the resolution becoming every moment weaker and weaker, Lady Adelaide had set an example many another wife, under similar temptation, might not, perhaps, act unwisely in following. She had taken flight, and occupied in upper regions, with Maud and millinery, much to the lady's maid's surprised delight, who seldom elicited her mistress's interest, either in the way of praise or blame, on these matters, was stifling as best might be the burning feelings within. That anything like a remonstrance from herself, however gently conveyed, would but serve to increase Lucia's difficulties, Adelaide did not need much discernment to ascertain; and that the child's disappointment should be compensated for at the cost of any sacrifice on her part, had become so instantaneous a decision the moment her husband's intention of really claiming the money—for the first moment she had doubted the possibility—became apparent, that it served better than aught else could have done, by reminding her the child's sorrow was but temporary, to calm the angered mother's, no less than wife's excitement.

Sir Allen took no notice of her absence, but turning once more to Lucia, bid her recollect, in conclusion, that the money was in reality his own. If any one had been robbed, it was himself; but if the thief, in the hope of purchasing salvation, had chosen to drop the stolen goods into her pocket in preference to his own, where lay the difference? "As to the pleading part of the business, which, in commonplace parlance, is, I presume, to be interpreted praying, you are quite at liberty to take that on your own

shoulders, Miss Lucia, and carry the injunction out to your heart's content, as it is to be feared, in this respect Sir Allen Mansfield cannot altogether accommodate the piously-disposed requester. I am afraid it would only be the guilty pleading for the guilty, instead of *vice versâ*. Nay, Miss Mansfield, what say you on the subject ? ”

“ I don't know indeed, papa,” said Lucia, her anger kept in abeyance to sorrow, as with a mocking tone her father asked the question, and putting his elbow on the table, awaited a reply, while two unseen ones in that room, not far distant from either father or child, shuddered over their respective guardianship — one that the guilty should speak, another that the innocent must fain listen to such language.

“ I do not know indeed, dear papa ; I suppose every one almost has done something wrong, though children's faults are different from grown-up people's ; but then I don't see why the guilty should not pray for the guilty either, if both are sorry, or even one of them.”

“ Thank you for the information, young lady ; since that is the orthodox theology, the said guilty, when in the humour for pleading for the comrade in question, will not fail to remember your instruction. There now, take up your five pounds, and for Heaven's sake put on a less woe-begone countenance. One would think I was an ogre waiting to devour you, child, instead of an indulgent father, making a far too extravagant present.”

Lucia hesitated for a moment between conflicting notions of right and wrong. Fearing to rouse Sir Allan's indignation by a refusal, and at the same time to act an untruth, by accepting a present she never intended to apply in the way he mentioned.

“ Do what I desire you, Lucia, and put the money in your purse, and let me see to-morrow what pretty things

you have spent it on. Your mamma can take you to the bazaar this afternoon, if she pleases. There is abundance of choice there for any one, and I suppose you haven't quite the assurance to tell me that rosaries and prayer-books, and such-like humbug, are the only things worth caring for at your time of life. Saints of all descriptions are odious, but premature ones, with baby-faces like yours, positively detestable."

"Indeed, papa," was the meek, though stedfast rejoinder, "I like pretty things very much, but I do not like to deceive you by accepting this money. I quite understand now what you mean, and see that it does not really belong to me at all; because, if stolen from you, it is, of course, your own; but at the same time—oh, do not be angry, papa!—I dare not spend it on myself—indeed, I dare not, after what is written here. Pray, do not be angry!" And, to hide the woe-begone face, she leant it down on the table.

"Angry!—not in the least. On the contrary, I am extremely obliged to you for putting five pounds more in my own pocket, you most egregious of all small donkeys. Here, hand it back again;" and returning the whole sum to his purse, Sir Allen rose to depart.

Was there fire hidden 'neath the gold?—and did the flames pierce through the strong leathern casing, and scorch those bold fingers?—or was it that the unseen one, no longer trembling, but bent in swift pity, even at the risk of inflicting agony, on saving that poor soul from adding another to the all but filled-up catalogue of crime already scored against it, approached nearer, to whisper in his ear of the awful past, and—O God! how merciful!—to renew the oft-rejected warning of the still more awful future? Did that seemingly cruel, yet loving whisper, bid him relinquish a hold on the alluring gold, by bait of which, aided by their still more alluring promises and infidel instruc-

tions, he and Satan in company had erewhile succeeded in unjewelling a crown once set in the pearl-like lustre of its baptismal purity!—a crown still unjewelled, yet one whose faded whiteness, washed in tears of penitence, and re-gemmed by the prayers Sir Allen had despised, might still shine dazzlingly where the past is forgotten, the prayer of innocence hearkened to, and penance accepted. To guess at these influences on Sir Allen's mind at that moment is all we may dare to do ; not ours to lift, save in imagination, the veil shrouding human actions, and the superhuman power directing beyond !

He rose, as we were saying, to depart with poor Lucia's newly-found treasure in hand, and a careless whistle, a favourite method with Sir Allen of demonstrating indifference, on his lip—but not three steps forward ere the whistle was exchanged for something resembling a groan, while the money was dashed, with bitter imprecation, to the ground. A picture on the wall, hung in an obscure corner of the apartment, and hitherto unobserved, but which the sun at that moment brought in contact with his eye, had attracted Sir Allen's attention. The print—for, though highly coloured and tastefully framed, it deserved no higher name—was but a simple one, and might have been seen in many another hotel in Florence, the artist's subject having been chosen successfully, and a sale unparalleled in the traditions of Florence's middle-class inhabitants having been the result. In the background an Italian cottage, trellised with vine-creepers, among which an old woman was seeking fruit, conveying the rich produce, as bunch after bunch rewarded her search, into the basket beside the wooden porch, formed but a secondary point of interest. At a few yards' distance, trimming a garland for the broad straw-hat lying at her feet, stood the figure of a young peasant-girl, dressed after the fashion of Florentine flower-sellers—a

bright scarlet jacket, blue merino skirt, and white apron trimmed over with fresh laurel-leaf, forming a pleasing contrast to the gipsy face and raven hair, curling naturally, and hanging in untaught grace over cheek and shoulder below. Round her neck, attached to a knotted silver chain, hung a crucifix and medal of the Sacred Heart, both evidently much prized by the wearer, from both having, though of no artistic beauty, been made to form one of the more prominent points of the picture. From the attitude of the girl—her attention divided between the hat-decoration and watching the grape-gatherer's movements with an air of smiling satisfaction—an approaching visit to the Casine, fruit and flowers in hand, might be anticipated; while the mother's anxious eye, bent form, and wasted cheek, told of dire necessity, and that alone being the motive alike of the child's exertion and her permitted peril; for, spite of open brow and guileless eye, peril, and that of no light character, were written both on dress and occupation, even had the wearer been less fair, and by twenty years less youthful. What there was in the simple purity of the whole picture to arouse anger, it would be difficult to say. Good feeling, pity, and admiration combined, the two figures might well have inspired.

Not thus, thought Sir Allen, however. Pitiless was the action, rough was the touch, with which, advancing to the wall, he tore the print from glass and frame, scattering the fragments through the open window, and then, every muscle quivering convulsively, turned to Lucia. The sounds which escaped his lips at first were formless, but they sounded like fierce and terrible execrations.

“Ill-fated child!” he at length hissed forth, “born to be my torment and misery, take your accursed money, and never let me hear of it again. What evil genius besetting my footsteps brought me hither at this moment!” he con-

tinued, spurning the gold from him with greater eagerness than a few moments before the purse and its contents had been claimed as his own—"I might have known this was her doing, that luckless haunting fool of a woman!"—the concluding words were uttered out of Lucia's hearing, as Sir Allen, slamming the door behind him, hastened from the apartment.

Unbounded was Lady Adelaide's astonishment on descending to the drawing-room, after watching her husband's egress from the hotel, to find her condolence, and promise of repaying Lucia's treasure at the first reimbursement from England, both alike uncalled for. Still more, on learning the cause of Sir Allen's sudden and extraordinary change of purpose, Lucia taking good care to soften the story as much as possible. "Papa had very kindly offered her five pounds to spend at the bazaar, after proving that the stolen money did in reality belong to himself. That she had refused to accept the money, because of her former determination not to spend on her own amusement what had been restored as an act of penance. That papa, she was glad to say, had not been the least angry, and had put the five pounds quietly back in the purse with the rest, but that on getting up he changed his mind, like a flash of lightning, gave back all the money"—she did not say in what manner, or accompanied by what words—"and left the room." The picture-scene was skipped over, and the words addressed to herself at the *finale* left untold. "All that must be kept along with other sorrows concealed from poor mamma," said the brave little heart, into which, at seven years old, the iron hand of suffering had first forced an entrance.

"And now, Lucia, by way of a change, suppose we drive this afternoon to Santa Croce—your Westminster Abbey, as the guide-books call it, and then on to the cemetery of the *Misericordia*. You were wishing the other day to pay

a visit there. Ah, Lucia, you were right to talk of spoiling—it is sad spoiling work to be treated in this way—every wish remembered—no gratification denied. Well for you, would wise Sister Agnese tell us, well for you that papa's severity and lack of affection, besides the shadow of a long-past, but never obliterated, suffering, should hang between you and the too sweet fascination of this new mamma's love.

There was little in the exterior aspect of Santa Croce, thought Adelaide, on reaching Lucia's long-talked-of Westminster Abbey, to interest the eye. A heavy pile of building, having no more resemblance to the said abbey than huge St. Paul's to spiral-arched La Sposa, at once surprised and disappointed her. So much having been said and written of Florence's antique old cemetery, Lucia led her from one monument to another, dedicated to her country's heroes, all shrouded in the gloom well beseeeming a church, beneath whose timeworn arches repose their little handful of dust who, with whatever lustre earthly fame may have begemmed their memory, now meekly await alike their summons to a tribunal in presence of which their names shall, perchance, first be echoed through the breathless audience-chamber around; no longer, however, in earthly enrolment of merit or reward; no longer as the genius to whose sovereignty the imagination of a less gifted fellow-man bent low the knee; no longer as the sculptor, who into forms of magic beauty wrought the poetry of his soul; no longer as the painter, who with life's undreamt-of loveliness inspired the blank canvas of his easel; no longer either as the poet, who at will commanded the power to draw smile or tear from the heart's depths a poet's soul glories to control; no longer to step forward thus heralded for victor's wreath or royalty's reward;—but as the lonely saint, who, in the dawning wrestle

of unappreciated genius, and barely earning wherewith to support existence, shared his morsel with another of poverty's yet more despairing children ; or as the youthful artist, who had, by risking his own fame's reputation, helped a sinking brother onward ; or as the sculptor, who to that title added a far more glorious one, by throwing the shield of a reverent protection round the young and beautiful peasant-girl, hiring herself out as model, and thereby earning a scanty subsistence for a bedridden mother. Thus bedecked, perchance, should these sleepers be then called forward, and bidden stand among the band whose deeds, never recognized in the archives of earthly chivalry, are yet emblazoned with indelible illumination on the crown of each lowly and contrite one who, in that day, shall be invited to "come up higher."

When Lucia led Adelaide to the tomb of Michael Angelo, and pointed out his statue, so placed by Angelo's desire that upon the doors of Santa Croce being opened, he might "SEE" from his tomb the cupola of the cathedral, his well-loved model of St. Peter's, and when from thence they walked on to the resting-places of Dante, Galileo, and Alfieri, and from these to fresco and painting of Giotto in perfection, Adelaide could not but acknowledge that, however great her disappointment on beholding the exterior of Santa Croce, both eye and heart were now satisfied.

"Do you see the sacred monogram over the statue of St. Louis, mamma?" asked Lucia. "I dare say you would like to know that St. Bernardine of Sienna placed it there after the plague during which the brotherhood of the *Misericordia* was set on foot. St. Bernardine was the inventor of those initials, and is reported to have travelled through Italy, putting up in every town and village he came to, and in the most conspicuous situations, the 'I H S,' to remind the passers-by of a name dearer to

them, as he hoped, than any other. It is also related that St. Bernardine having remonstrated with a card-player on the sinfulness of his calling—card-playing being at that period the occasion of much scandal,—the man pleaded poverty, and the needs of his family, as an excuse for the proceeding. The saint bade him paint these letters upon cards and sell them. The plan answered so admirably as to obtain from the card-player, henceforth, a fund of inexhaustible gratitude towards his benefactor."

While gazing with painful interest on the figure of St. Francis receiving the stigmata, reserved in a darkened niche behind the high altar, our sight-seers were struck by the sound of music, cheerful almost to merriment, outside the church, and hastening into the front aisle, they beheld what appeared to be a bridal train advancing into the porch. A young priest, vested in white, advanced to meet the procession, composed principally of children walking hand in hand, wreathed with flowers, and chanting in joyous measure some psalm of thanksgiving.

"It is a child's funeral," whispered Lucia, as, to Adelaide's unfeigned astonishment, a bier, in place of the expected bride, followed the white-robed train into the church, upon which, according to Italian custom, lay the body of a little girl, dressed like the living children around her, and crowned as brightly. The bier was carried by boy acolytes, their scarlet robes contrasting prettily enough with the whiteness of all else around.

"Suffer little children to come unto me," intoned the priest, sprinkling with holy water, and then incensing the corpse at the altar foot: "For of such is the kingdom of Heaven," responded the acolytes. A few more prayers, another hymn, and, once more raising the corpse, they bear it from the church, chanting as they wend their way to the cemetery of the *Misericordia*, "Bless the Lord, all ye

His elect: keep days of rejoicing and give praise unto Him."

Following the procession at a short distance, and not unaccompanied by many another child and mother, old man, and merry maiden, came Lady Adelaide and Lucia, their silent cicerone not ten yards behind them. After seeing the baby lowered into its tiny grave, and listening a few moments longer to the mourners' singing, which appeared likely to prove interminable, Lucia stole away to her mother's grave, situated in another part of the cemetery, and Lady Adelaide, guessing rightly she would like to be left alone there, turned into an opposite path, saying she would like to take a survey of the monuments, and being in no hurry to return home, should not expect Lucia to find her out for the next half-hour. Fragrant as every other spot round and about fair Florence, with the breath of flowers growing in rich luxuriance on every side, was the atmosphere around. The violet-embalmed air ascended like incense, and as though in mute adoration from the sleepers beneath, up to heaven. Beside the graves were planted crosses of every imaginable design, from the simple unadorned Latin to the more elaborate Maltese, entwined with wreaths of *immortelles*, some quite fresh, others in different stages of decay, more than one entirely faded. Faded *immortelles*! strange paradox; but theirs the stranger inconsistency, who, from the flowers of another land, first stole the appellation. The stillness reigning in undisturbed majesty around was broken at intervals by the sound of distant chanting: "Eternal rest give to them, O Lord! and let perpetual light shine on them." Other funerals were taking place, others, mourners, graver-faced ones than the train at Santa Croce, had entered the churchyard.

"They do not forget their dead," pondered Adelaide as,

seating herself by a monument at the feet of which knelt the figure of one upon whose "face was carved the impression of unceasing prayer," she listened to the sounds. "It is, even the most prejudiced must acknowledge, a religion externally beautiful," continued she, yielding to a mood more meditative than those usually indulged in by the thought-shunning, rather than thought-forgetting, lady of Haseldyne; "but for myself a system of mere external loveliness has little but a passing fascination. I am not a child, like Lucia, to be attracted by flowers, or an enthusiast—a dear, unselfish, practical one, but for all that, still an enthusiast,—like St. Clair, to consider music and architecture, processions and incense, a component part of spiritual worship. On the contrary, were it not for the life of real devotedness, of entire self-abnegation, which this religion of theirs appears in every direction, whether at home or abroad, in the cloister or in the world, so fruitful in producing, such a system of æsthetics would be to me in the long run often wearisome, if not even positively distasteful. Let me, however, but once perceive all the outward ceremonial to be but the natural expression of a revealed truth, and I have done with argument. One thing, at all events, my visit to Italy has accomplished, in bidding me no longer rest content with the uncontradicted, because uncared-for, opinion of others on points which, if anything at all, are worth something more than the mere assent of an uncultivated understanding—cultivated on all points save one,—of a childish, and far worse than childish—lukewarm acceptance of an unexplained, because unquestioned, theory."

When Adelaide returned to Lucia she found the child still kneeling by her mother's grave, her head bent down, and hands clasped above; but on rising to return home, no tears were visible; her face wore the look of one recalled from a happy visit to some long absent friend.

Several weeks fled past, well-employed ones by our Florentine enthusiasts, who, since Lucia's purse adventure, found themselves left more than ever to the undisturbed enjoyment of each other's society. In another month or six weeks, according to Sir Allen's last arrangement, they were all to proceed to Venice, and from thence to Rome—a visit looked forward to by both ladies, especially the younger, with intense delight; their time meanwhile being fully occupied from morning till night in discovering fresh sources of amusement, both in and around the neighbourhood of their present home. Their afternoon's drive one day would be to the monastery of St. Sabine, in search of the only picture respected by the rabble in the Florentine siege of the turbulent sixteenth century—that "Last Supper" of Andrea del Sarto, an inspiration which even the rough populace, spite of excitement and party-spirited selfishness, could not find the heart to destroy; from thence they would proceed to the Tower of Galileo, not forgetting to refresh their memories by a visit to the exact spot upon which the interview between the aged philosopher and youthful Milton, assisting the old man there in his blindness and solitude, is said to have taken place. Another time the Poggio Imperiale, or Grand Duke's palace, would claim attention; and from those cypress-shaded avenues our travellers would wend their way to the celebrated Bello Squardo, that loveliest of all lovely views, as Lady Adelaide always exclaimed to her little companion, on quitting the summit of the miniature mountain, until Lucia's invariable, "Oh, no, mamma, the one from the hill of Fièsole is twice as beautiful, and we ought to go there some evening at sun-setting," raised her expectations higher still, and decided the early dinner and long evening drive to the spot in question as the first vacant day's arrangement. On arriving at the foot of the hill, however, upon which the town of Fièsole is situated, it

became necessary, owing to the steepness of ascent, for the ladies to leave the carriage, and clamber on foot up the narrow flight of steps conducting to the Franciscan convent in the distance, and from the gardens of which, so said Lucia, they would be allowed the privilege of viewing the surrounding scenery, one of the monks being an uncle of her dear mother's, and always delighted to show either herself or her friends over the monastery—that portion of it, at least, left unenclosed,—no woman's foot being permitted to enter within the cloisters or more secluded parts of the building. About half way up the hill stood a monument, a pleasant resting-place for tired travellers, dedicated to the memory of Fièsole's patron saint, and if tradition speaks correctly, martyr also, St. Romulus. To the right of Saint Ansano's chapel, a few yards further in advance, lay the shaded wood attached formerly to another Franciscan convent; and lower down were the conventual buildings once belonging to the Dominican friars, who had, in all probability, been compelled, during the times of persecution, to abandon the peaceful monastery, into which their order had never since gained a re-entrance. Pursuing their way beneath the thickly shadowed avenues stretching around and above them—catching at intervals many a sudden glimpse of loveliness into the valley below,—our now really wearied-out friends reached at length the door of the convent at the summit of the mountains, as Lucia had long ago christened the hill of Fièsole, and on inquiring for the Padre Francesco, were immediately conducted, by a lay brother, to the monastery gardens, whither he promised, on hearing of their arrival, the padre would soon follow. Nor had they to wait many seconds ere an aged monk in the Capuchin habit, a cord round his waist, and feet sandalled, was seen slowly advancing towards them from the left-hand wing of the building, dedicated exclusively to the

use of the older and more infirm members of the community.

"Benedicite, my little one!" said the monk, signing the cross on Lucia's forehead, as the child ran up to kiss his hand, not forgetting, in the first place, to salute with somewhat more formal courtesy the lady by her side; and then turning towards Adelaide, again in reply to Lucia's few words of whispered information, he addressed her in English—the slightly foreign accent used in doing so being barely perceptible. "My little niece tells me," said the monk, with a smile of grateful approbation, "that you, madam, are her new mamma, and that you make her very happy; may God bless you, my daughter, for the sake of her who was dearer to myself than aught beside in this world, and is now, we may not doubt, a saint in paradise." A tear started to his eye as pointing to Lucia (who, well aware of her privileges in the monastery garden, was gathering flowers by handfuls, humming meanwhile, in her pretty musical voice, the words of a favourite Italian hymn, now translated into English, under the name of "Happy Flowers") the old religious inquired whether Lady Adelaide found the little one docile and obedient.

"I should be miserable without her," was the almost impetuous answer. "She is the greatest, nay, the only comfort of my life."

"Not quite that, I trust, my daughter," was the earnest, yet gentle reply. "No earthly creature, however innocent, however engaging, should possess a power thus unlimited—excuse my freedom—you spoke doubtlessly as many do, without weighing the meaning of words which to us poor monks"—and he smiled again,—“accustomed, you know, as we are, to silence and recollection, sound sometimes startling."

"You are mistaken, father, in this instance," continued

Adelaide, in the same impulsive tone (for to speak her thoughts, or at least a portion of them, out, appeared at that moment, an impulse next to irresistible); "I spoke not unadvisedly in calling the child out there my greatest, my *only* comfort; my life without her, now we have once become acquainted, would be a miserable blank, one wholly void of interest or occupation, save those even you, father, would scarcely bid me seek interest in, or rather, I should say, amusement and forgetfulness—a negative kind of happiness at best."

The monk gazed earnestly into the face of the highborn, wealthy, and beautiful Englishwoman, as in the bloom of youth and loveliness, the bride of one short year, she stood before him. Surely, if this world's best gifts, strung together and lavishly showered down on one human being, could bestow happiness, the lady addressing him had little cause for heavy-heartedness; and yet her last words, together with their intonation, sad almost to despair, spoke of anything but happiness. The monk hesitated to pursue the subject. Was he called upon—had he indeed any sort of right to reprove one, who, until this moment an entire stranger, might possibly regret, on a moment's reflection, having spoken thus openly, and feel pained, even offended, at any further notice being taken of confidence thus unguardedly bestowed?—and yet, what matter? he had a mission to fulfil on earth, a physician's work to carry on, and the patient, unconscious of her danger, and for that reason, above all others, doubly pitiable, stood in his pathway.

She departs not from our monastery unwarned or uncounselled, was the rapid decision, as in a grave, but still more winning voice than before, Father Francesco again addressed his visitor. "There is no such thing as misery to the Christian, my daughter;—pardon my again contradicting,

but the experience of a life some four times longer than your own, justifies me in making the assertion, that no one, unless by choice (a strange one, it must be acknowledged, and yet not always rejected), need ever be miserable."

"But how can they avoid it?" exclaimed Lady Adelaide, her whole soul springing, for one brief moment, to her lips; "how can any one avoid it with a heart shattered into a thousand pieces through their own wilful folly, their own deliberate madness, the fault committed, and its punishment, in severe retribution, to be therefore borne alone? How in such a case as this, father, can any human being avoid being miserable—utterly, hopelessly, miserable?"

"Only by laying the shattered fragments of which you have spoken at the foot of that awful altar whereon the Heart of God Himself was once shattered for their sakes—the altar erected on Calvary. Laid there in meekness, they will be reunited; and a reunited heart, my child, knows not the meaning of hopelessness, and has unlearned that of misery."

Adelaide made no reply. Her spirit, still depressed and darkened, grasped not the full meaning of Father Francesco's words. Nor was the good padre surprised or disappointed. The entire peacefulness, the total absence of unrest, towards which his words had pointed, was not, as a long life of obedience and submission had taught him, to be even comprehended, much less embraced, in a moment; and yet, neither the monk's words nor their accompanying prayer had been uttered in vain. The first key-note of the long and silent miserere Adelaide's soul must learn to intone ere it would be melodized into a dirge more restful and harmonious had been struck in that quiet convent garden; but the momentary excitement had passed away, and, resuming her original reserve, Adelaide adroitly changed the subject, by remarking on the beauty of the grounds, and inquiring whether the

community cultivated both that and the adjoining fruit and vegetable gardens with their own hands. The monk replied in the affirmative, saying they looked upon this part of their employment as a daily recreation, "and a blessed one, too," he added. "We learn many a deep theological lesson from these simple flowers, I can assure you, my daughter; but see, the sun is about to set, and your principal object in coming here being, no doubt, like every other traveller, to obtain a view of the surrounding country from the highest point of elevation in the foreground, I will, without delay, conduct you thither. Come, my little one" (to Lucia, who, with her usual delicacy of feeling, had purposely remained aloof during the foregoing conversation), "we await your presence, and must one and all hasten our steps."

Italian sunsets, like tide and time, linger not for idlers, and, hastening forward, he led the way to the elevation spoken of, reaching it, as predicted, only just in time to gaze down upon a panorama which, once beheld, must for ever cast all others, with few and far between exceptions, into shadow—a shadow no landscape, however fair, but need be well content to retire under, so rich in beauty might it still remain. The last rays of the parting sun were kissing, with deep crimson light, the distant mountain, cypress forest, palace and convent, while at the gazer's feet no longer a stream of silvery whiteness, but glowing as though of molten gold, shone the spirit-like Arno. Far away to the south-east spread the chain of the southern Apennines, among whose undulating ridges the beautiful river takes its rise; and just distinguishable in the extreme distance, along the valley of the Arno, might be faintly discovered the cathedrals and tower of Pisa. Looking again due south, the hills on which Sienna is situated might have recalled to the pilgrim's eye of the aged father, the city far beyond, the earthly home of the Catholic's heart; while, in imagination,

he might have once again knelt before her altars, offering up, in the vigour and strength of early manhood, all this world esteems most as worth regard, wealth, honour, youth, renown, talent, friendship, and love itself, perchance, with her brightest visions yet unfaded, to the undivided service, the perpetual adoration of One whose voice and example had summoned him onward to a life of poverty, lowliest humility, and unflinching self-annihilation. Wrapped in these, or, it may be, far different meditations, the monk and his visitors stood silent spectators of the dream-like realities around, when the sound of the Angelus from the unnumbered convents scattered on the surrounding hills, stole musically on the ear; and, at the same moment, the deep voices of the religious in the Franciscan chapel, chanted out their evening devotions. Far away lay the bridal city, with her towers, palaces, and exquisite churches—the tall belfry of Giotto, the Baptistry and its gates of paradise, Santa Maria de Novello in her nuptial loveliness, Santa Croce with her many dead, Santa Spirito, and others too innumerable for even passing notice; while, above all, rose the vast dome of fair Florence's cathedral, protecting in episcopal grandeur, and yet saint-like simplicity, her clustering children around, looking meekly upward in beautiful symbolism, as the Church ever doth to her visible head for direction and guidance. And higher still arose the master dome of a still more glorious cathedral, built upon arches invisible to mortal eye, and supported by foundations laid in the hour when God said, "Let there be light, and there was light;" while higher and higher, and loftier yet, arose another temple, but of that, alas! we know sadly little, excepting that the walls thereof are garnished with all kinds of precious stones, and that there are twelve gates of admittance, and every gate marvellously formed of one single pearl; and a few other poor ideas we have formed for our-

selves of that far-off, unseen cathedral. We may learn more of the subject by and by, if we will; for the gates are standing wide open day and night, and the guides waiting at the entrance to explain the mysteries of its architecture, and to recount the legends of the saints, with whose life-like portraits its long aisles are peopled. A few moments longer and the sun dipped behind the horizon, while the whole firmament—nay, the whole earth beside—became in one instant flooded with richest rose colour, blending softly, yet gaily, in with the half blue, half violet tints which ever encircle Italian, or indeed any oriental scenery, and account, no doubt, in great measure, for the transparency of atmosphere and colouring never recognized to anything like the same extent in more northern countries.

“Ah! bella Italia,” cried Lucia, no longer able to restrain her enthusiasm; “Bellissima Italia—is it not heavenly, mamma?”

But Lady Adelaide could not answer her darling. It was not Lucia’s “bella Italia” alone that had thus choked her speech, and troubled her inmost soul. That vision of loveliness had become, as it were, endued to her with sacramental grace. The “electric chain” (wherewith the poet declares our spiritual nature to be darkly bound) was once more vibrating. Why called he it not rather the one wherewith we are *brightly* bound? for, is not each link fashioned with minutest accuracy by the loving hand twining that chain around the labyrinth of our earthly destinies, only to guide us more securely onward to the bright goal where the strangely-tangled maze shall be for evermore unravelled?

Lady Adelaide is surely not the only one who, having gazed on some such scenery as the hill of Fièsole can present, has turned away with the feeling of one permitted to kiss the hem of His robe, with whose slightest touch comes healing and peace.

"Could anything be more perfectly lovely?" murmured Adelaide, half aloud, as they reluctantly quitted the eminence.

"Only one thing," in the same lowered voice, replied the monk.

"And what may that be, father?"

"The vision of the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off," replied the religious, while, with a faint colour tinging his withered cheek and lending a passing lustre to the still unquenched eye of eighty summers, he looked upward, something in the expression implying—so Adelaide fancied—that far-off vision's, to him, swiftly-approaching and gladly-welcomed nearness.

The monk detained his visitors a few moments longer, in order to exhibit in the church of St. Alexander, attached to the building, more than one valuable relic of the ancient acropolis, on whose site the present monastery was built; after which, perceiving the evening's rapid advance, he conducted them to the convent gate, and, having embraced his little niece, and taken a friendly farewell of Lady Adelaide, he returned to his cell, praying that God would safely guide both child and mother through the world of shadows, along whose perilous pathway he had been so long a traveller, and from which, if summoned that very night, he would feel so little loth to depart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHY are you so silent, madre mia?" inquired Lucia, as they descended from the convent, and retraced their steps as quickly as possible to the distant carriage.

"I was only thinking, Lucia, how charming it would be if we could only manage between us, you and I, to make poor papa more happy. He has not looked at all happy lately."

"Oh, yes, indeed that would be nice, mamma. It is always delightful to make other people happy, especially when——"

"When what, Lucia? Do tell me, darling, unless it give you pain, what it was you were about to say."

"I want helping to—to do right. Do you, mamma?" said Lucia, speaking in a sorrowful voice, and casting her eyes to the ground. "Well, then, I meant to say, when they have made one unhappy, when they have not been quite kind—I hope it was not wrong to remember this. I dare say poor papa is very sorry, and I am very sorry—oh, so very, very sorry for him. I do wish he would let me love him, even if he cannot love me in return."

"Well, Lucia, we must see what can be done. Gentlemen, like papa, have a great many more things to try their temper and patience, and all that, than you, who have always been brought up in a quiet, peaceful convent, with nothing to vex or irritate you, can imagine."

"And yet, even there," said Lucia, archly, "people, some people, not very far off, did manage to get out of temper, now and then. Besides, I dare say papa, when he was a

little boy, had not even one dear kind mamma to teach him gentleness and patience; and I, lucky child, have two—one up there," pointing to the sky, "and one here," and she took Adelaide's hand caressingly within her own, and held it tightly the remainder of the way home, while feelings deeper and more unworldly than any that had hitherto found a resting-place within her, took up their abode as newly-welcomed guests in Lady Adelaide's bosom.

Sir Allen came in to a late supper that evening, looking more gloomy and morose than usual. He had, among other favourite amusements, been playing high, and having met with worse luck than on setting out had been at all foreseen, the chagrin and disappointment concealed under a more than ordinary gaiety of exterior in public was at the present moment ready upon the slightest pretext to find vent in word, as look and manner already indicated. But Sir Allen's coldness and want of interest were no longer repaid with like coin in return. Lady Adelaide, after having with her own hands conveyed the cup of coffee he had commanded rather than requested her to send to him, sat down in the arm-chair opposite, and began, in a manner amusing and affectionate as that lavished of old on the ever attentively listening St. Clair, to give her husband a long detailed account of their visit to Fièsole, omitting carefully the name of monk or convent, or, in fact, any thing that might cause annoyance to him in the graphically-drawn sketch of their day's adventures; but her efforts at amusement were treated with indifference. Sir Allen made no reply till the cup of coffee and two or three successive ones had been despatched, and then taking up a magazine lying on the table, he coldly observed that the drive to Fièsole was as familiar to him as Regent Street, and in his opinion, not one-half as agreeable. The roads were hot and dusty, and the long walk up the hill intolerable; after

which announcement he became, to all appearance, absorbed in the contents of what a very few days before he had denounced as one of the slowest publications in Florence. Poor Lucia, meanwhile, crept about, trying by a thousand little devices to attract her father's attention, but equally in vain. She went up to kiss his hand before retiring to rest, but he pushed her from him, saying angrily, "Do not be troublesome, Lucia; I cannot endure slobbering children." The child having departed, Sir Allan rose and began restlessly to pace up and down the apartment. "I am thinking of returning to England in a few days," he said at length, turning abruptly to his wife, "but cannot exactly fix the day. Will you and Miss Lucia be good enough to hold yourselves in readiness to set out at an hour's notice?" He paused, in full expectation of a storm; well knowing with what eagerness both Lady Adelaide and Lucia had looked forward to their prolonged tour, and, above all, promised visit to Rome. His reason for not proceeding thither as proposed being one that would ill undergo a minute investigation, even had his wife's and child's pleasure and disappointment been a less secondary consideration with Sir Allen. Unmixed was his surprise at the cheerful, affectionate tone in which Lady Adelaide replied that both Lucia and herself could be ready at any time, and that their Florentine purchases should be concluded early the following morning. "How very obliging we are this evening!" he replied with a laugh sarcastically provoking. "Lady Adelaide is, doubtless, weary already of Italy, and needs a little English change of air, since she is so ready to depart."

"No, not weary of beautiful Italy," exclaimed Adelaide, rising impulsively, and crossing the room towards the window beside which her husband was standing. "But she is weary—tired altogether of opposing any wish of Sir

Allen Mansfield's. She owns herself sadly to blame, and craves forgiveness. Will he forget the past, and suffer her to begin from this evening to ——?" Her gathering tears concluded the sentence as she laid her hand gently on Sir Allen's shoulder. He knew well how proud that nature was. He knew—none better—how much the effort thus to humble it before him must have cost her; conscience pointed out to him the one most needing forgiveness—the far guiltier party in their till now mutual estrangement; but he listened not, or if forced to listen, did not heed. The hand was shaken off with an expression of annoyance and irritation as he replied—

"Pray do not let us have a scene, Adelaide, of all absurdities on earth the most detestable. Lucia and her priests here have, I suppose, been persuading you to act the penitent—the contented and dutiful wife—and I abhor religion; you might ere this have discovered the fact, had you chosen to take the trouble. For Heaven's sake contradict my wishes to your heart's content; it not only gives me the charming little amusement of enforcing them, but adds materially to your own personal loveliness. Lady Adelaide never looks so well as when a little excited. Remember one thing, however, my dear, and there let the present conversation end: I will have no absurd leave-taking between Lucia and her nuns at the convent of the Annunziata, it being my wish that our somewhat unlooked-for departure from Italy should not be made unnecessarily public, and nuns, of all people in the world, most dearly love an excuse for gossiping. I strictly forbid either yourself or Lucia paying another visit to the convent!" and having uttered these words from beginning to end in the cool, dispassionate tone more estranging to a woman's heart than the most furious anger, ringing, too often, once and for ever, the death-knell of her affections, Sir Allen left the room.

Lady Adelaide stood where he had left her long after the door had closed behind her husband. For the first time since their marriage Sir Allen's unkindness had failed to arouse the desire of retaliation. A weight, as of adamant, lay upon her spirit—the weight of a rejected affection—a scoffed-at penitence. That heavy sigh removed it not. With hopeless crushing suffering would it lay through life upon her soul, unless chiselled by The Invisible into the form of His cross, and sculptured lovingly within her bosom.

After standing as though rooted to the spot for ten minutes or more, Adelaide lighted a candle and went up into Lucia's room. The child was fast asleep. Adelaide, putting the candle on one side, knelt down by the bedside. A delicately-carved crucifix hung immediately above, freshly wreathed with violets and white roses—emblems, at once, of purity and suffering. Beneath the crucifix was nailed a scroll, painted by Elise, the little French girl at the convent school. On this was inscribed the words—“ *Ici j'ai trouvé le repos.*” Adelaide gazed long and earnestly—gazed, as she had never gazed heretofore, on that Agonized Face, with its expression of untold, uncomprehended suffering; on that drooping, thorn-crowned Head; that Bleeding Side; that wasted, emaciated Figure; and then on the child sleeping peacefully beneath, in blessed illustration of the announcement above her. A tear lay on her cheek—one caused, no doubt, by her father's parting words; but the expression of the face was one of perfect peace. She had come weeping to bed; papa had pushed her from him. Mamma could not leave the room to comfort her; Maud was spending the evening with friends;—all seemed lonely and desolate. But, before laying her head down to sleep, Lucia had knelt on her little pillow and kissed, with the reverent, yet almost passionate devotion of an Italian child, the Sacred Hands and Feet of the Crucified, and then had

looked up longingly to the Face above. Was it not bent down towards her? Might she not—would it be irreverent to embrace That also? The little heart was well-nigh bursting—the too-vivid imagination completely overwrought; and, as she gazed—and gazed immoveably—on that Face of awful Love, across which the moonlight flickered so brightly, the lips appeared to move—to smile—to invite her approach, and springing up, she pressed her childish lips to *His*, bathing them with her tears, and then kneeling down once more, she prayed what in an English, or less impulsive, child would have seemed an extravagant, if not unnatural, petition. She prayed for the grace of an entire, undivided consecration to His service—of a love dedicated to Him alone—of any suffering, any hardship, any cruelty, rather than a separation from His Sacred Heart, who had thus invited her to kiss His very lips! Awful, yet blessed prayer!—too seldom offered, though never left unanswered. Other voices, young as Lucia's, now mingling with those of the hundred and forty and four thousand of whose song none other may catch the melody, have long ere this made like supplication. Well was it for Lucia that the ardent and passionate nature inherited from both parents, though in her mother subdued by the power of religion into childlike gentleness, had been directed heavenward. Alas for her had the case been otherwise. As Adelaide continued her vigil, the child murmured in her sleep: the only distinguishable words were "Mamma and heaven," and then, "Happy—happy—happy." At length Adelaide, tearing herself away, departed to her lonely room, but the words inscribed on Lucia's scroll seemed as though written on the walls, held somehow visibly before her eyes in the invisibility of the very air around: "*Ici j'ai trouvé le repos.*" Repose! she scarcely grasped the meaning of the word. Her whole life since earliest womanhood had

been under some form or other one of constant unrest, unsatisfied longing, and, during the last two years, one of positive unhappiness. So much for the past; what of the future? She might try,—nay, with the remembrance of Fièsole fresh in her memory, her present *determination* was to endure wrongs patiently, leaving retaliation behind her. But *repose—rest!* For her the words were never, surely, intended; and yet that sleeping little one had already fathomed their meaning, and lay hushed beneath its influence. “Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden,” whispered Adelaide’s guardian angel. Were Lucia and a few other such exceptions the only ones invited in the “ALL YE”?

Lucia’s grief at the next morning’s announcement, reluctantly enough conveyed by Lady Adelaide, of their long hoped-for visit being no longer in perspective, was far outdone by the subsequent intelligence of papa’s wish. The word “command” was purposely omitted regarding the convent. The first disappointment was, in truth, bitter enough; but the last filled the poor child’s cup of sorrow to overflowing. She said little, however, on the whole—little in comparison of what passed within. The impulse of throwing herself at Adelaide’s feet in the same excited manner as, a few weeks previously, at sister Agnes’, was but momentarily yielded to. Rising instantaneously, and blushing deeply from cheek to brow, she expressed, in a few simple words, her sorrow for the fault. She had not intended to do wrong; but sometimes a terrible feeling, like the stab of a sharp knife, came passing through her—“here,” she said, pointing to her heart, and almost stopped her breath, and then she could scarcely help falling down—only *scarcely*, though she did not want to make it an excuse, and would try hard never to let it happen again. The next request, that she might be allowed to go out in order to purchase

pictures and images, as a parting present for the nuns and *pensionnaires*, though not permitted to bid them farewell, was gladly acceded to by Lady Adelaide. And few prettier sights than the child's flushed face, as with a sort of lingering mournfulness she selected the pictures—her best proof of affection to those long-beloved ones she might never see again in this world—could have been witnessed in Florence that July morning; the printseller, meanwhile, entering with characteristic enthusiasm into the whims and fancies of his little countrywoman, gesticulating vehemently on the merits or demerits of his merchandise, as the pictures were either approved of or rejected, coinciding, unhesitatingly, in her judgment on the subject, and fully prepared, no doubt, to have been equally complacent had Lucia's taste been less fastidious. A search after images, toys, and sweetmeats, for the convent children, and various other small purchases, for the benefit of Lady Adelaide's English friends, completed the morning's work; the afternoon being spent in despatching Lucia's treasures, accompanied by many a note of affectionate farewell to the convent of the Annunziata.

It was well they had been so expeditious in their proceedings, thought both Sir Allen's wife and daughter, upon his announcing his intention, that very evening, of setting out from Florence early in the forenoon of the succeeding day. Lucia, having obtained mamma's permission, rose with the sun that last dear morning, as she called it, of her life in Florence, and attended by Lorenzo (nothing loth to be at the beck and call of his smiling little signorina), threaded her way through the, at present, half-deserted streets, to the cathedral of Santa Maria de Fiore, knelt once more at Her Altar to receive "The Bread of Life," and having made a longer than usual morning's meditation—with the imaginative child never a matter of difficulty,—was

about to quit the church, turning round at least half a dozen times in her slow, very slow, march down the centre aisle, to cast another and another glance at arch and pillar, painting and window, not forgetting the lily-embedded pavement beneath her feet, when, at the door of the cathedral, she was accosted by a woman shabbily attired in black, her face entirely concealed by the crape veil and hood held tightly over the wearer's face. Lucia not having caught the speaker's words, and guessing from her appearance that the object must have been to solicit charity, was drawing out her purse, when the woman's shake of the head and emphatic, "No, no, signorina!" altered her opinion.

"It is your prayers I crave," whispered the woman, bending low, and speaking in a broken, purposely unnatural voice, pressing her lips to the small ungloved hand by Lucia's side. "Your prayers, signorina," she continued hurriedly, as though anxious, having obtained her guerdon, to depart without further notice.

"A daily one, poverina!" was the soft, pitying answer; "and in return offer up a short one for me."

"With what intention?" asked the woman, as though inspired by a sudden curiosity.

"For to-day's, if you will—a return, ere life be ended, to the Convent of the Annunziata."

"Ah!" exclaimed the woman, starting from her half-recumbent position, and widely extending her arm; "is it indeed so? Dare his promise be thus speedily broken?"—the last words were muttered aside. "But fear not, little one," she continued aloud; "by the God of Heaven, present on yon altar, and in the name of Her who knew not sin, your prayer shall never be forgotten by the pleader who once more asks for yours. May they both be answered, though from lips, alas! how different, for the sake of —"

she bowed her head at the whispered name, and ere Lucia could again reply, had vanished out of sight.

"Little astonished at the poor woman's request, by no means an uncommon one among Catholics, whether of high or low degree—though somewhat flurried by her strangeness of manner, Lucia pursued her way back to the hotel, no longer followed, however, by the watchful Lorenzo only. Another figure, though lingeringly and at a distance, dodged her footsteps; and as the child, with the half-spring, half-bound of eleven-years'-old forgetfulness of sorrow, ascended the hotel steps and passed within its doorway, a tear—a strangely bitter one from an eye well used to weeping, a stranger would have said, if worth his while to gaze upon a face too faded now for this world's admiration, though none may tell how gaily decked for another,—fell heavily on the pavement. The unseen watcher lingered but to wipe its traces from her cheek, however, ere forcing her way, spite of obstacle, into the Hôtel Impériale, and addressing Lorenzo, who, with his back towards her, was directing portmanteaus, trunks, and packages innumerable, standing in the hall and adjoining passage, she inquired quickly whether Sir Allen Mansfield were at home.

"He is and he is not," replied Lorenzo, without looking round. "By that I mean that he is certainly within, but only at home to himself. No one else can possibly have a word with him. The signor is on the point of leaving Florence, and far too much engaged to see any one."

"He is not too much engaged to see me," was the woman's quiet answer. "Be kind enough to carry him this note. I come on business of pressing importance—business," she said, approaching nearer to Lorenzo, "concerning the welfare of the signorina, Lucia. You would fain do her a service, if ever so small a one. Is it not so?"

"May be it is; but how came you or any one else to know

that?" said the page, rising, and trying hard, though not impolitely, to peer through the woman's disguise.

"No matter, Lorenzo; let it suffice thee to learn the fact that thy watchful care of the little signorina has not passed unnoticed. Thou needest not be either alarmed or ashamed at the news. And now for my note;—that's right; quick, for time passes swiftly—and Heaven reward you for this act of charity."

"Well, Manetta, my good girl, I am really delighted to meet you again," was Sir Allen Mansfield's greeting, as, the door having closed behind her, he advanced to meet Lucia's invisible protectress, as the veiled stranger ought truthfully to be designated. "I am both delighted and surprised to meet you, having been informed you had married and gone to reside at Pisa."

"Quite true, signor; but my husband and little boy—may they rest in peace—are both dead, and I am once more alone; but could have earned enough for my own livelihood in Pisa, and have greatly preferred, for my own sake, remaining there, had not other and more important reasons caused my returning thither."

"Well, Manetta," said Sir Allen, flurriedly, and opening his pocket-book, "I shall be delighted to afford you all the assistance in my power; and feel sure, without your saying so, help is greatly needed at the present moment, or you would not be dressed in that fashion. It quite distresses me to see you, my girl. Here, take these, along with my kind regards;" and more than one silver note was held out for acceptance.

"Never!" exclaimed the woman passionately;" and then, checking the rising anger, she added, in a softened tone, "it is cruel to insult me by offering them; but I accept the humiliation, signor, as a penance for the past. I have richly deserved this punishment."

"Ah! Manetta, how foolish!—how worse than foolish!—how really absurd! thus to look back and brood over the past! Let bygones be bygones; believe me, that is the only true wisdom. I would say more on this subject, Manetta, and ask for a fuller account of your own proceedings the last few years, were time, this morning, at my own disposal; but, to tell you the truth, I am much hurried, having a good deal to transact in the way of business before leaving Florence, which I propose doing this afternoon."

"I am aware of it, signor; and it is for that reason alone that I have come—wretched as it makes me to see and speak with you. I have a vow to fulfil—a solemn one; it having been made to the *dead*."

Sir Allen shuddered slightly—very slightly; but had discretion enough to make no reply.

"What are you going to do, signor," continued the woman, going at once to the point, "with the signorina Lucia? Why are you taking her, at this early age, and quite contrary to your former promise, from her convent and her native land? This is the question I have come here to ask, and in reply to which I must request from you no evasive answer."

"Upon my word, Manetta, this is carrying things a trifle too far," replied the gentleman, half angrily, and assuming a tone of injured dignity. "What possible right have you any longer to interfere with my domestic plans and arrangements?"

"Every right in the world, as far as that child is concerned—no further. However, do as you like in the matter, signor; you are your own master," and she turned to leave the room.

"Stop—stop! Manetta. I did not mean to vex you; only that abrupt way of yours always provokes me so excessively. It is really very kind and unselfish of you, con-

tinuing to bestow such disinterested watchfulness over my daughter's welfare; but you may set your mind quite at rest about her. The young lady is as much spoiled and petted as even you could desire. As to her remaining at the convent, she might stay there till doomsday for all—I mean, if it were for her happiness, and could be possibly arranged; but I assure you people in England, as well as here, are already throwing out hints of my unparalleled cruelty in leaving Miss Lucia behind me; especially now I am married again, and have no excuse for not bringing her home.

"And your wife—the new Lady Mansfield—what of her?" inquired Manetta, with a searching look into Sir Allen's face. "What sort of a stepmother does she make the poor little signorina?"

"Poor little signorina! I admire that beyond anything," laughed Sir Allen, rubbing his hands together with an expression of intense amusement; "why, I tell you, the child is spoiled from morning to night; a great deal more than is good for her, in fact, although, for fear of being considered a monster of cruelty, I never interfere. Lady Mansfield makes a perfect idol of her new toy;—will that satisfy you, Manetta?"

"Not altogether; I wish to ascertain the fact from her own lips, and must, therefore, beg for a private interview with her ladyship. I will not detain her long."

"Impossible, girl! you are ridiculously unreasonable to expect such a thing when, as I tell you, we are on the point of starting from Italy."

"I fully intend to see her, nevertheless, signor, either in public or private," was the quiet reply, as, with a peculiar expression, the woman raised her eyes to Sir Allen's. He shrank beneath their look of brave determination, and walked to the window.

“But surely, Manetta, you would not be so base—so malicious as to—to mention—to make mischief.”

“Not I, signor,” was the scornful answer; “had I seen the lady ere her marriage-day, poor thing, I might have been thus tempted, but it is too late now. I wish simply to assure myself of her affection for the child; and neither man nor woman but would find it difficult to palm a pretended love upon Manetta; you need fear nothing beyond this, signor, I give you my word for it.”

“Well, Manetta, you always have been, and always intend to be, a wilful woman—that is very clear. You must, I suppose, have your own way, though inconvenient as it is in this instance to oblige you;” and he rang the bell. “I wish I could again persuade you to accept a little memento of my gratitude for your kindness to my daughter; pray, for her sake, if not for mine, take this purse, and make what use you will of its contents, after having first made yourself look a little less like a used-up nun than at present.” And Sir Allen smiled facetiously.

“No!” said Manetta, laying the purse he had forced into her hand on the table gently, “give it to some one who, though no poorer than myself, would not commit sin by accepting your charity. And now, signor, one more word ere we part, never probably to meet again in this world, though once again, whether by choice or not, we must meet hereafter. “Ah, master! awful will that meeting be for you and me and all who, like us, have down here encouraged one another in sin and wrong. Ere that day arrive, I would try as far as maybe to undo the harm, by word or action, inflicted by me on my fellow-men—you, signor, among the number. Six long years ago, you asked the servant girl now standing before you whether she had folly enough left to believe in a better world than the one she had learnt alone to live for. Gladly at that moment would she have

answered no ! for they to whom the sunshine of God's smile has become hidden would fain persuade themselves of its nonexistence ; she tried hard to live without it, did that poor girl ; she had money—fine clothes—gay compliments, and all that a vain and giddy woman so madly covets. But life became a hell, and at last, in very despair, she sought that smile once more. Nor had she, though miserable and unworthy, to seek long in vain. You may recover it also master ; you may yet bask beneath its calm moonlight, though for penitents the first glad sunshine of innocence has for ever departed ; yet in that soft still light, master, is perfect peace—unutterable happiness. Seek it, signor, seek it while there is yet time, where that poor ignorant woman sought it : in the blood which cleanses from all sin. And when she meets you again in the Great Judgment Court above, do not accuse her of having done her part towards shutting that smile out from your soul for ever——”

“Show this person up to your mistress's room,” said Sir Allen to Lorenzo, who, with no small amount of curiosity written on his face, answered the bell.

“Addio, signor,” said Manetta, as curtsying respectfully, and once more shrouding her face from observation, she followed the page upstairs.

“What a fool the woman has become !” was Sir Allen's ejaculation, reseating himself for a moment's meditation ; “I wonder who will next turn saint. Would to Heaven I could escape from the worry and annoyance of this everlasting religion. Clara is the only woman I ever met with not, more or less, imbued with its humbugging doctrines. One comfort is, the woman will keep her word, or should we not have charming scenes, I and my proud wife on returning to England, when this sudden fit of meekness she has chosen for some whim or other to adopt evaporates ! The only one virtue I ever observed in these confounded Catholics is that

they keep their word, through thick and thin ; they are no doubt frightened into it, and so much the better. Those gentlemen of the stole and cassock know what they are about. I wonder, by way of changing the subject, whether Clara has yet set out ; I have half a mind, were it not for those letters from England, to go and see."

Manetta, meanwhile, had reached Lady Adelaide's dressing-room, and Lucia being fully occupied in her own, Manetta's request, conveyed through Lorenzo, for an interview with his mistress alone, was granted without difficulty.

"Can I do anything for you, my friend ?" inquired Lady Adelaide kindly, glancing at the poor woman's shabby though well-made and carefully-mended clothing.

"No, *grazia signora*," replied Manetta, lifting her veil and gazing stedfastly, oh, how stedfastly, at her interrogator ; "I have not come hither to beg, and must crave your ladyship's pardon for intruding at so inconvenient an hour, my reason for doing so being the unexpected departure of yourself and family from Florence. Your intention of remaining here till the autumn having got abroad it was entirely unlooked for."

"Then you have business, perhaps, to consult either myself or Sir Allen upon before we leave ; if so, tell me at once, and I will do my best to obtain what you wish—that is, if time will permit, but the hours are drawing on, and at one o'clock we depart."

"Many thanks, lady, but it is not of myself or on my own account in any way that I would now speak ; the Signorina Lucia's departure from Florence and the friends of her childhood is the sole motive of my visit."

"Lucia!" exclaimed Adelaide ; "my own dear child !" and rising from her seat, she took a chair beside Manetta ; "are you acquainted with the little one—and what have you to say about her leaving Italy ? Do not tell me you would

have her left behind and away from me. That wish would, indeed, be a cruel one."

"Is the child so dear to you, then?" and the Italian woman looked up as though endued with power to read into Adelaide's very soul.

"Dear to me, did you say? ay! dear as the sunshine to the flowers; or rather, for it is a truer simile, to the cold bleak wilderness. I never have loved—never shall love any child half so fondly." And excited by the woman's manner and inquiries she burst into an unmistakeably mother-like flood of tears.

"Deo gratias!" murmured the Italian woman, making the sign of the cross; "my prayer, unworthy as I was to offer it, is answered—my work is done—now Sir Allen Mansfield, I am satisfied!"

"What know you about my Lucia, good woman, if you have no objection to confide in me?" inquired Lady Adelaide, speedily recovering her equanimity.

"Not in the least, lady; on the contrary, it will give me pleasure to talk to you on the subject. I was the little one's nurse, signora, and gave a promise to her mamma, a few moments ere she breathed her last, that I would keep, as far as possible, a mother's eye over the poor little girl. They were passionately fond of each other—my poor lady and the child."

"And you promised to keep an eye over her, did you?" exclaimed Lady Adelaide, with increasing interest, as Sir Allen's story returned to her memory; "some mystery lies hidden here: that woman's worn and faded, though still finely-cut, features speak not of deception. Tell me something of Lucia's mother," continued Adelaide: "did she resemble the little one?—were her eyes as mournfully dark, and her voice as much like music?—and her death, was it a happy one? Lucia told me it was sudden, but always

shrinks from any details on the subject. Tell me, pray do, if you have time, all you know of her history."

"It would be useless, signora; and besides, I cannot linger much longer. Well, well," in answer to Adelaide's silent pleading, "these are the particulars, as far as I am acquainted with them:—She was an Italian lady by birth; more softly beautiful than starlight; her father and mother were both dead at the time of her marriage, or they would not surely have allowed it to take place, on account of her extreme youth—she was but fifteen—too young, signora, far too young. Some distant relations of her mother's, from whose house she married, were the ones to blame for this: glad enough to get the signorina off their hands, they put her forward over soon; and young girls are giddy and light-hearted, and seldom look many steps before them. It is said that her uncle, who is a monk in the Franciscan Monastery at Fièsole, wrote to remonstrate, but his arguments were not attended with success. The cares of life came quick enough upon my poor lady; the signorina Lucia was born ere her mother had completed her sixteenth birthday; and never a day's health or strength did my lady enjoy after the death of her second little girl—born and buried in the following year."

"And was her life, spite of this, a happy one?" was the next unanswerable question; "tell me that, Manetta—you see I know your name, from Lucia;—was her mother's life, setting aside the want of health, a happy one, think you?"

"She was one of God's saints, signora, and they are something more than happy: her life was like a flower's, as pure and nearly as brief; her death like a little child's. 'Manetta,' she said, calling me to her side, 'I am dying; promise to watch over my Lucia, like a kind mother; and then God, ah, He is very good, Manetta! He will be sure to bless

you for it! I made the promise; who could have refused?" Here Manetta stopped and raised her apron, no longer an embroidered one, to her eyes. "Well, signora, to make my story a short one,—she called down blessings on my head did my poor mistress, and then crossing her little white hands—such tiny ones—on her bosom, she smiled: a smile like to hers, at that moment, I never hope to see again, and looking towards her little girl she said, or rather sang, for it sounded like music in that great room, the last two lines of the 'O Salutaris Hostia;' the hymn Catholics, you know, signora, always sing at Holy Benediction; the words came out so distinct and loud—

“ ‘ — qui vitam sine termino
Nobis donet in Patria.’ ”

I always seem to hear her singing those two last words whenever I go to Benediction—'in Patria.' It was quite too much, even for me, hard-hearted girl as I then was; my head got confused, and twenty voices in the room seemed to be repeating, after my dying mistress, 'in Patria.' Just then the Angelus rang out, and I fancied something flew past me; it must have been fancy, for my head was swimming and dizzy. When I looked round at the signora again she was dead."

"And Lucia!" said Lady Adelaide, sobbing.

"Ah! poor lamb! poor lamb! she was kneeling by her all the time, trying to say her rosary, and nothing would satisfy her that night but to sleep on the bed close beside her dead mamma; so I and one of the other servants sat up in the next room with the door open, for we didn't like to leave the child alone there, and yet we didn't like exactly to be talking in the same room with those two."

"And where, all this—all this time, was her——" Adelaide paused.

" Her husband you mean, signora : Sir Allen was not at home when my mistress died. He expected, on returning that evening, to have found her better, and was much shocked at the news of her sudden death."

" Then it was unexpected to the last, Manetta. How was the suddenness of her seizure accounted for by the physicians ?—are deaths of this nature of common occurrence in Italy ? "

" More or less so, I dare say," was the evading reply ; " and as to physicians, I have no great faith in their opinions, after my mistress's death," continued the narrator, hurrying on, " the little one was sent to the convent school, and shortly afterwards I married and went to live at Pisa. There ends my tale, signora," said Manetta, rising to depart, anxious, for every one's sake, to avoid further questioning.

" But, Lucia," suggested Lady Adelaide, " would you not like to see her, and judge for yourself whether or no she is happy under her step-mother's care ;" and then, calling to mind Sir Allen's injunctions—always by some strange fatality forgotten till the last moment,—she blushed and hesitated.

Manetta, however, without noticing her confusion, at once declined the offer, saying " the interview would but recall painful thoughts to the child's mind. She had not been an over-indulgent or gentle nurse to her in days gone by, and was, for that, if for no other reason, best forgotten. Children's memories ought, if possible, to be happy ones. As to the rest, she was perfectly satisfied—more than thankful, and would only ask for one other favour—a short account, from time to time, of Lucia's welfare and happiness in England." Having gained her point and received Lady Adelaide's fervent congratulations on the zeal and earnestness with which her mission had been fulfilled, Manetta

bade farewell to the Hôtel Impériale, and a few hours afterwards the sound of a travelling-carriage rattling through the now well-crowded streets announced to passers-by the fact of another family party—whether English or otherwise was difficult to ascertain—having taken final departure from Florence. Few eyes were quick enough to perceive among the passengers a little Italian girl who, with closed eyes, leaned back as though asleep, while the carriage rolled swiftly onwards. The sleep, like many in like leave-takings, was imaginary, for papa must not see her cry, and how could tears be kept back from those eyes allowed for one moment to rest, when perchance leaving it for ever, on her City of the Beautiful.

That day three weeks Lucia and Lady Adelaide Mansfield went to spend the day with May Templeton and her little brother Algernon, in Hamilton Street, Westminster, where they were living quite alone, under the careful superintendence of their old and faithful servant Phœbe.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I have not time
For human love on earth,
In heaven that may be."

LINES ON ST. FRANCIS XAVIER.

" 'To be in the saddle at nine, P.M., and in readiness to start.' Thus were the last orders from head-quarters worded, old boy, since you are so anxious on the subject. The engagement is, I presume, supposed to take place at daybreak; but that pleasure must depend, no doubt, on the enemy's movements. It strikes me, however, they won't need waiting for long, the rascals—or poor wretches, as I suppose you, Arthur, in the Xavier-like immensity of your charity, are disposed to call them. By-the-bye, old comrade, you'd better, all things considered, take that book home with you this evening—Xavier's life I mean. The fate of my goods and chattels, in case of defeat, or, or——" (and here the boy-speaker's voice slightly faltered as the word "death" passed his lips) "being somewhat uncertain. Receive, at the same time, my unbounded thanks for the loan. I would not have missed reading that glorious life for all her Majesty's and the Company's dominions put together."

"You admire him, then, Charley? I thought you would. It is in the style of heroism most suited to your taste."

"Admire him! The word is too poverty-stricken in speaking of Xavier. He is henceforth my hero and my model, and this country, (except for the memory of such as him, an accursed one,) my future home, my field of labour—not the labour of destroying, any longer, the

earthly life of these miserable idolaters, but after the example of Xavier, at once brave priest and soldier, in fighting for another victory."

"Charley," exclaimed Arthur, starting from the ground upon which, on entering the young lieutenant's quarters, he had thrown himself, "are you in earnest? Do you mean what you say, or is this one of your usual jokes? Can it be, indeed, my poor miserable sacrifice thus richly rewarded."

"Mean! yes, I should just about think I did mean. It's time I meant to do something with this life of mine, besides bullying my blackies, doing the jolly at mess, and slaughtering these unfortunate barbarians whenever they happen to assert the not altogether unnatural yearning for freedom and independence we English dons—to say nothing of tyrants—have thought fit to deprive them of. Methinks, Arthur, a handful of Xavier's disciples out here might scatter seed, the fruit of which even our prejudiced countrymen may some of these days have no objection to reap the harvest. They will find their Hindoo dependents none the worse soldier for being a good Catholic—nay, even a good Papist, since they love to honour us with the title. No need to stare in that way, Arthur, as though the sanity of my brain were, in that sceptical mind of yours, a somewhat doubtful admission. Your fortnight's absence has, for once in a way, not been, even with that wild good-for-nothing fellow, Charley Godwin, time misspent. Xavier's life, and above all the prospect of this approaching struggle, have, between them, finished the work which (and God bless you, old boy, for the trouble) you have spent these last two years trying to accomplish—the salvation of one soul. Little time remains for thanks, however. My final admission only waited your return from Loudiana. Every preliminary step has been already taken. My friends having been, as

you are aware, Baptists, and my having left England—to use the technical phraseology—wholly unconverted, consequently unbaptized, the Sacrament will, thank God, be in my case, not conditional. Time is hurrying on, Arthur; let us go at once to the priest's quarters; you will return with me afterwards and receive my last instructions—you who until now have more usually been the instructor!" and drawing his arm within Arthur Templeton's, the young officer hurried him away.

Three years of banishment from England—three years of mental toil and wearying anxiety—a mother's death at the very moment that toil had been repaid with success, and her life, had it been prolonged, freed henceforth from pecuniary embarrassment—his own life's disappointment (and who but one gifted with the like vocation may ever conceive its bitterness)—the prospect of another ten long years ere he could hope to revisit his native land, friend, or sister,—these, and trials greater than these, perchance, were repaid, how richly let the pleaders say, who have asked and received, sought and found a treasure only to them less valueless than eternity itself. As Arthur stood beside priest and boy-officer that December morning, the latter already equipped for battle—it might be death,—and heard the firm and steadfast vow, the question and answer, "What dost thou seek?"—"Faith!" "What will faith give thee?"—"Eternal life!" marked the descending stream, the sign on heart and forehead, whose power the accursed one was challenged never to dare violate; watched the manly hand, too ready almost for combat with an earthly foe, as it grasped the lighted taper, gently touched the stole, and held the white linen placed on head, in symbol of baptismal innocence—while, with bold and fiery eye, now subdued to the meekness of a child, the newly-baptised drank in the words of the Church, bidding him carry that white garment

stainless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and keep his light burning against the Bridegroom's coming, and entering into the temple of God on earth, have part with Christ in life everlasting. And when Arthur saw the tears streaming through the closed fingers as the now child of the Catholic Church knelt for the closing benediction, he thanked God in that moment, did Arthur Templeton, and in many a one of less excited joy hereafter, for having brought him to India—for having crushed his own soul's aspiration, left unanswered or rather answered in direct contradiction to his boyish prayer, that from the ashes of the sacrifice might arise another altar to His glory—the altar of a human heart dedicated. Ah, how strange seemed the coincidence to the selfsame task his own had once sworn to espouse!

“And now, Arthur,” continued Charley Godwin, as in the hurry and bustle of preparation immediately following the return to the latter's quarters, he managed to convey at least three or four dozen messages to Arthur's ears in fullest confidence—not one, however trivial, being forgotten,—“remember this, Arthur—I mean, if God spare my life, you and I are to be henceforth *one*—not in heart alone, for that we have long been—but in every other sense of the word. Purse-strings, paltry as the consideration may be in itself, but not as regards our future undertakings, by no means excepted. The spirit of a Xavier might, in these days, pardonably quail before the plague-stricken sentence—‘want of money!’ Heaven, in this respect, has been to me over-bountiful, considering the use its liberality has hitherto been put to. This, Arthur, be it known to you, is the only promise I require, under your word of honour, ere we separate—that, should I survive this campaign, you and I are to be fellow-travellers to old England, and, a month or two subsequent to landing,

allowing that space of time for sisterly embraces, friendly remonstrances, awful warnings from anti-Papistical old ladies on the iniquity of one's proceedings, lawyers' letters on the state of one's finances, and the various other interruptions your imagination has already painted, fellow-collegians, and, by-the-bye, old boy, the Fates permitting, fellow-labourers in this vineyard out here, Xavier for our apostle, his footsteps our guide—eh, Arthur? What says my grave friend to this arrangement?"—and the boy's eye lit up with an enthusiasm, the strength of which he had expected his friend fully to comprehend.

Had the seven years' difference in age, and the three of trial and disappointment already quenched a similar flame in Arthur's own breast? or did the possibility of the young enthusiast never being called upon to fulfil an engagement undertaken at a moment thus awfully critical, damp the smile and check the exhilarant reply expected by the other? Or was it that, having learnt not alone to bend beneath, but to take home as a cherished friend, the sorrows of the past, Arthur could not at once enter into the joyous vision presented to his soul?

Either of the last, but not the former supposition, may possibly have been the right one. Enthusiasm in Arthur's soul burnt as brightly, ay, and tenfold more brightly, than when at Charley's age he had poured out its deepest longings into Father Paul's ear at Haseldyne—for enthusiasm such as his departs not with later years, nor bends to the withering temptations of despair; it has but learnt to lay hidden and silent at the foot of destiny—all the more intense for that concealment—till the trumpet-tongue of exertion bid it to arise, calmed, chastened, and subdued, with the words "What wilt Thou have me to do?" sounding as its watchword.

"I see what you are thinking of," continued Charley,

tearing up meanwhile packet after packet of old letters, newspapers, song-books, stale cigars, and the various other heterogeneous masses with which a young lieutenant's sanctum is generally well furnished; "you think me over-hasty, if not even guilty of downright presumption, to be talking in this strain, when, ere to-morrow's sunset, it is quite possible both my hopes and prophecies will have come to a conclusion. But, remember, Arthur, that, should that indeed prove the case, your path is as clear as day. Though still so sad a schoolboy in appearance, I reached my one-and-twentieth year last month, you recollect. In that desk lies my will; I entrust it to your care, and, to prevent your being taken by surprise, propose informing you beforehand of its contents. Half my property, including the few hundreds falling to my share the other day by the death of my aunt, I leave to Ellen, poor little girl,—you will see and comfort her, Arthur," faltered the young man, presenting a letter to his care. "I wish she had been blessed with a less self-willed and headstrong brother than Charley Godwin; but she is married now, and has, I trust, gained a better and more dependable protector. The rest of my belongings, after a legacy or two to distant relatives who may fancy they have a claim on them, I have taken the liberty of leaving to you, old boy, with this proviso, that should you, in one of your crotchety moods, object to spend the money on your own—as you are pretty sure to call it,—self-indulgence you will employ it for the use of the Church, the first and foremost object being to provide some young and zealous man with the means of entering the Society of St. Ignatius, under promise of his being hereafter sent out as missionary to this country. No thanks, for God's sake, Arthur; it is to Him I make this poor offering, through you, His instrument in my conversion to the faith. May He accept, even though you may see fit to reject it."

"I do not reject it, Charley," was the reverent and scarcely articulated reply ; " but you will forgive my apparent coldness. God's ways with His near-sighted and distrustful children are at times overwhelming ; they stun one. But, oh, if you did but know, Charley," choked out Arthur, grasping the young man's hand, and trying to speak with calmness, " the untold happiness of this day, you would be satisfied ; and for yourself, my boy, I don't know how it is, but I have a presentiment so brightly vivid, I am superstitious enough to believe it will prove true, of to-day's enrolment being but the commencement, on your part, of a career so glorious an angel's soul might well envy your pathway, as to destroy half my anxiety in bidding you farewell."

In conversation such as this, did the few hours preceding the departure of the regiment wear away, Arthur remaining by the young lieutenant's side till the last possible moment, and their parting, thanks to the former's sanguine prophecies and the latter's trust in their fulfilment, being a sufficiently cheerful one.

Many a long and bloody day, however, passed ere they once more met. The battle of Moodkee, the one referred to in Lieutenant Godwin's announcement to Arthur, followed by the hard-fought engagement at Ferozeshah within a week afterwards, having ended, though victoriously as regarded the English army, yet in laying many of her bravest officers, Charley Godwin among them, on a couch of suffering which, in not a few cases, proved to them ultimately that of death. The young lieutenant, however, thanks to youth and good spirits, recovered sufficiently to be under arms again at the attack upon Sobraon in the following month, during the course of which engagement his singular intrepidity of conduct not only attracted the attention and won the confidence of all serving under him, but led, at the conclusion of the campaign, to his immediate promotion as

captain, a post little coveted by Charley, the poor fellow into whose place he then stepped, and who, in the very moment of victory, had fallen by his side, being, next to Arthur Templeton, his best friend in India.

"How strangely," wrote Charley to Arthur, on the day succeeding the battle of Sobraon, "does your prophecy, so far as my life is concerned, appear likely to be fulfilled. By the merest accident—to use the world's language, the narrowest chance—have I, over and over again, during the course of these engagements, escaped the jaws of death. Twice has a ball from the enemy pierced my sleeve; more than once has my horse been shot under me; while at Ferozeshah I was left for dead upon the field, and only discovered to be still in this world by the persevering search of poor Douglas, whose own life is at this moment despaired of. Beresford, brave fellow, and one for whom, too, many a heart beside my own is now aching, lies beneath the waters of the Sutlej. To describe the scene at that river, Arthur, requires a better photographer than myself: with the victory in our own hands, and at the moment of a soldier's exaltation, it was awful to witness the frown of undying hate written on the helpless face, as each brave man—for brave, even to madness, did the heathen soldier prove himself all through this campaign—sank beneath the water. It will never cease to haunt my memory. Many a victor forbore to strike as that look met his own, and far greater would have been the compassion excited among us by the awful confusion, carnage, and dismay, on the part of the enemy, had not our pity been in some measure damped by the recollection of their barbarity in the slaughter of our own poor wounded, too often left to their mercy by the fortunes of war. This battle," continued Charley, "will, it is believed, close the campaign for the present year, at all events, the projected conquest of the Punjaub being, owing to the lateness of the

season among other considerations, set aside for the present; nor to tell you the truth, Arthur, do I at all regret that the opportunity of honourably quitting the service altogether is thus early afforded me ;—not that either hand or heart would ever weary of sword or bayonet were the cause in which they are borne a shade or two more glorious than the mere annexation of a few thousand miles of territory ; the crushing of an all but indomitable foe, and the exaltation of the English arms. My ambition (tell it not in Protestant England) has risen far beyond *this* consummation of our native country's work out here ; nor have the scenes witnessed during the last three weeks tended in any measure to disenchant the vision set before us on parting—the glory of the cross, the final subjugation of India to its influence. What has England as yet, with every earnest intention—we deny her not that honour,—done for this country in that respect ? let the unprejudiced among her children declare ! Discord and disunion, uncertainty in whom to place trust, and want of authority to command, can but produce in India, as, alas, it has but too surely done in more enlightened countries, a species of scepticism, a form of unbelief, of sarcastic incredulity in the doctrines of Christianity, more awful to contemplate than even their present ignorance and idolatry. For Cross and Holy Church, then, be our next banner unfurled, and bravely, in the strength of the former, shall the latter's victory be contended for. The rougher the battle the more honour to be engaged therein. Then, as to our meeting again, old comrade, the hour depends not on myself, or 'twould be no distant one. I am looking forward, however, with all the ecstasy of a new convert, to the coming Easter. That festival, God willing, we must positively spend somewhere between this place and old England in company ; little consequence the spot, so that it be nigh "Home :"—and *that* word to you, old Papist, needs no interpretation.

Be it in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, to spend next Easter near my new home is all I seek for. And now farewell, Father Templeton, of the Holy Society of Jesus—how well the words sound ! Ah, Arthur, how far more than *well* ! Write soon, and let your epistle be no shabby one, to yours in the faith,—CHARLES XAVIER GODWIN.”

CHAPTER XX.

“ While the white city, strong in faith and love,
Looks on her azure inlets from above,
And wraps old memories round her like a spell,
Of shipwreck’d Paul, who loved her land so well.”

“ The Maltese boatman chants his even’ song,
Freighting with Mary’s name the moonlit air
That silvers many an old memorial there.”—FABER.

It was a lovely day in March, and fitly so. The Feast of Our Lady’s Annunciation should not be ushered in by gloom, and brightly shone the sun his welcome that glad spring morning over the town of Valetta, casting many a ray on the azure Mediterranean, swelling in waves of rippling melody against the white stone terraces with which Valetta’s shore is bounded ; while the freshness of the air, infrequent for the most part in Malta, lent increased enjoyment to the scene. The streets were thronged, and numbers of walkers—women especially—passing forward up the Strada San Lucia, and Strada San Giovanni, all evidently bent on one and the same errand. Moreover, had a passer-by glanced at their faces as now and then the graceful faldetta was rearranged by the wearer he would have beheld many a dark eye beneath sparkling with eager animation.

On the water, no less than on land, was Valetta’s world busy. The curiously-shaped polaccas were flying to and fro from the opposite shores, where many of the English residents are quartered, few returning unladen with human cargoes to their original destination. One of these boats now touched the pier, and a foreign-looking individual—the unmistakeable air of “courier” written on every movement—sprang up

and gallantly assisted the two ladies in the polacca to alight, informing them, in the same breath, that, except with speed, he feared the chances of obtaining good places for the coming spectacle were but doubtful. Following his advice, the ladies mounted with haste the long flight of steps conducting straight from the water's brink to the Strada San Marco, and from thence to the Strada San Giovanni they arrived at the grand square, in centre of which stands the church of the Knights Hospitallers—the gem and boast of Malta, disappointing all visitors, nevertheless, at first glance, by its almost barn-like exterior. The square was filled with people, the black dress and faldettas of the Maltese ladies, worn also by not a few English ones present, being relieved here and there by the bright uniform of an English officer. The windows of the houses opposite were crowded with spectators. Our friends, threading their way fearlessly through the quiet and orderly mob around, took their places at a window engaged previously by the courier. They were scarcely seated when the crowd began to sway on either side, thus leaving a passage in the centre for the procession, at that moment seen issuing from the Strada San Lucia, after passing round the town on its road thither, while the distant melody, heard before at intervals, now burst forth into an inspiring strain, and was taken up by the crowd:—

“ Ave Maris Stella,
Dei Mater alma,
Atque semper Virgo,
Felix cœli porta.”

A long train of acolytes, bearing in their hands lighted tapers, appeared first in view, followed by lines of religious from various orders. The white dress of the Dominican, the brown Capuchin and black-robed Carmelite, might, among these, be distinguished. The confraternities with which

Malta abounds, arrayed in the colours of their different societies, closed the whole, while the dense crowd, every moment increasing, now began to press onwards. As the procession at length reached the church of the Knights of St. John the organ burst out in triumphant strain, the choir, within and without, joining in unison,—

“ Monstra te esse Matrem :
Sumet per te preces,
Qui, pro nobis natus,
Tulit esse tuus.”

In the midst of the train, carried on the shoulders of six members of the Rosary Confraternity, was a lifesize figure of the Blessed-among All Generations, and in the mother's arms reposed the Divine Child; and as they bore into the church this beautiful, yet but too faint resemblance of that Son and that mother, on the vision of whose beauty countless hosts are daily feasting, still louder swelled another song—the prophecy first chanted ages ago on the mountains of Galilee, by the child-maiden of Judea, now so wondrously fulfilled; while a group of children, issuing from the doorway, strewed flowers before the image of Mary of Nazareth; and now the procession advances up the centre aisle—the banners of the knights, who so long since fought the good fight and kept the faith, and whose hallowed dust lies peacefully beneath, awaiting the resurrection of the just, waving above. On reaching the Lady Chapel, they replace the sacred image. The celebration of High Mass follows, and the worshippers have no need to gaze longer on the sculptured loveliness of their Saviour's incarnation; for, lo! at the word of His priest, He Himself descends upon the altar, veiled, and in as great, ay, in far *greater* humility than when, eighteen centuries ago, He came into this weary world, veiled in the flesh of a little child, and slept on

Mary's sinless bosom in Bethlehem's stable. He comes now!—ah! that we dare write the words—to repose in the very hearts, on the very tongues, within the very breasts of His unworthy people!

The service over, the crowd began to disperse, and the church was rapidly emptied. Here and there lingered a worshipper, while groups of foreign visitors, under the escort of guides, remained to examine different portions of the edifice. Among the latter might be seen the two ladies before mentioned, eminently distinguished, however, from the rest of their country people, by the quiet reverent manner in which their researches were pursued. The mosaic flooring, frescoed roof, various and richly-decorated side chapels—that of the blessed sacrament more especially, with its gates of silver chasing—having each, in turn, obtained due meed of admiration, our visitors, accompanied by other wanderers, descended to the underground chapel, where the tombs of the grand masters, claimed no passing interest from those who, like our two English friends, regarded these monuments not as mere relics of bygone romance, but as memorials of heroes enrolled in a holy cause—supporters of a noble principle—they who, in place of lady-love and kingly renown, cared alone to win the high prerogative of guardians of the poor, imitators of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

On leaving the church, the courier Angelo, declaring it necessary for him to go on errands into Valetta ere they proceeded homewards, inquired as to where the young ladies would prefer to remain during his absence.

“We will wander about and lose ourselves, by your leave, Angelo,” exclaimed the elder and taller of the two, laughing somewhat boisterously, “thus giving you an opportunity of playing at hide-and-seek the rest of the afternoon.”

“Oh no, indeed, Augusta,” objected the younger lady

laying her hand on the other's shoulder; "we must not walk alone. What would your mamma say?"

Reassured, however, by Angelo's smiling information, as to the propriety of Valetta ladies becoming at will their own *cicerones*, the latter plan was agreed upon, Angelo being desired to finish his business with all speed, and meet our two friends, Augusta and Rachel, on the shore at a given hour, in readiness for the polacca, and to start at once for the opposite side of the harbour.

The arrangements having, to Augusta's delight, been completed, Angelo departed on his errands, and the ladies on their voyage of discovery. Before, however, detailing their adventures in the streets of Valetta, let us first inquire by what course of events our two sub-heroines—Augusta Cunningham and Rachel Templeton—had wandered so far from their English homes. In order to accomplish this, we must return for a season to our old friend Mrs. Cunningham.

Not long after Lord St. Clair's departure from England, this lady, among other whims and fancies, on the score of that well-beloved individual, self, had become suddenly inspired by the idea of her delicate frame requiring (it being, as she asserted, inexpressibly exhausted, both mentally and physically, by the unreasonable demands made on health and spirits in London's fascinating, but too *exigeant*, atmosphere) absolute change of air and country. Travel, for at least the next twelve or eighteen months, she must and would. No other plan might avail to save her from sinking into an untimely and premature decay—grave being too commonplace a term for Mrs. Cunningham's vocabulary. Like a vision had her existence glided into being—like a dream would it hence depart, were her present yearning unfulfilled. Mr. Cunningham, with the laudable good-humour not a remarkably supernatural acquirement in a

man gifted with excellent digestion, abundance of money, and time at his command—moreover, having at the present moment no personal motive for declining—was easily enough persuaded into the arrangement, rejoiced to find that for once in a way his fair wife's inclinations happened to coincide with his too often refractory Augusta's, the person more generally, in matters of greater or less import, consulted by her father.

Miss Augusta, for her own part, cared little for travelling. A good horse and plenty of country before her being in her opinion far preferable to all the romance and fine scenery in the world. The young lady, however, having become, spite of her eccentricities, more and more warmly attached to both the Miss Templetons during the course of their last two years' acquaintanceship, and knowing well how true a cause for anxiety existed in Rachel's present state of health, caught immediately at Mrs. Cunningham's proposal, and with her usual prompt generosity declared, that could some young lady friend of their acquaintance be persuaded to accompany them, nothing could give her greater pleasure than to travel for a year or two. The young lady's part of the story, however, was to be understood as an indispensable requisite; and their daughter's whimsies, whether reasonable or unreasonable, crazy or otherwise, being in the opinion of both Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham the law of the Medes and Persians which altereth not, every available and unavailable young lady of their acquaintance was summoned to appear in Banquo-like procession before her ere the point was decided—the two Miss Templetons among the number. This was precisely as Augusta had anticipated, and the two last-mentioned girls being, in her wilful opinion, the only ones worth having, could either of them be persuaded to leave home—one from the two Miss Templetons was, if possible, to be selected partner of their travels. May, the

elder one, Augusta feared, could not, on account of her little brother Algernon, possibly be spared; but Rachel's society would be equally agreeable. Mrs. Cunningham was altogether enraptured—in complete ecstasy at the idea of that sweet, elegant, accomplished creature, the friend of Lady Adelaide Mansfield and Lord St. Clair too, being chosen as their companion. Oh! it was just the very thing—she must go! she positively must! no stone must be left unturned in order to persuade her. The proposal was accordingly made and accepted—thankfully, very thankfully, by Rachel's sister; wearily enough by the poor child herself, to whom the thought of going abroad would, a year or two before, have been considered next best to revisiting Haseldyne.

The travellers had started in the autumn, and spent rather better than a year on the Continent, ere, in accordance with another freak of Mrs. Cunningham's, a visit to Malta, wafted thither on the azure waves of her poet-beloved Mediterranean, had been projected. The entire change of scene and country had taken, not only an imaginary effect on Mrs. Cunningham, but a real *bond fide* one on Rachel's health and spirits; and yet not to this alone could the recovered elasticity of either one or the other be entirely, nay, chiefly ascribed. Rachel's character had needed strength—the strength which, save in the school of suffering, is not easily acquired. In bowing her head meekly to the will of Him who sends His children no unneedful sorrow, she had found repose; in the accepted though piercing cross rest and peace. Her voice might not, perhaps, sound as joyous or her gay laugh ring as of old; and in her face an acute observer (a somewhat rare personage by the way) might have recognized the look of one who had suffered much and silently; yet her manner and bearing were sweet and winning as ever, and her beauty more enhanced from

increased softness of expression. Poor Effie's reverence and affection for Rachel had also been of no minor assistance in helping to form the latter's character. No greater blessing can be conferred on women of Rachel's yielding, impulsive disposition than the knowledge of their influence over one still more weak and impulsive, looking up to them for help and guidance ; and thus, in the truest sense of the word, did Effie to dear Miss Rachel. As to Augusta and herself they jogged on together according to the usual order of friendships in natures wholly contradictory, with the utmost placidity. Augusta's to command, decide upon, and arrange ; Rachel's to consult, vacillate, and finally, with smiling submission, yield obedience to the other's superior judgment—each happy in her own particular sphere, and neither's faults coming in collision with her neighbour's. Rachel's admiration fixed on Miss Cunningham's cleverness and absence of timidity ; the latter on her little companion's humility, for Augusta could often afford to admire where she little cared to imitate. Besides, according to this young lady's peculiar mode of reasoning, no one ought to be artificial ; which, being interpreted, meant that no one should aspire to virtues in any degree supernatural ; consequently, humility in herself, though attractive enough in Rachel Templeton, would be the shallowest unreality, to say nothing of affectation.

And what says our little Rachel, all this time, to May's betrothal, and with what aspect forecasts she [that dear sister's departure at some future day (the engagement being an indefinite one) from home and native country ? Has Rachel determined, when the looked-for hour arrives, on accompanying her sister, and little Algernon, and old friend Frank Egerton to that far-away Australia, the land whose very name suggests the idea of exile—exile, from which few, save as passing visitors to the old "contree"—their this

world's *patria*—ever look to return? But Rachel is silent. Neither are opinions or intentions to be at present even guessed at, for the very matter-of-fact reason that Rachel, on the usually most unconcealable of all secrets—an engagement—is not yet admitted to her sister's confidence. May's character has clearly deteriorated, far from increasing, as time advances: in either wisdom or courage, she has become more and more a coward. Never yet—no, not on her little sister's departure for the Continent—has the frequent attempt, the almost feverish desire, to enter upon the subject, of all things now in life, save Rachel's happiness, the most important, been accomplished. Time after time had the words flown to eager lips only with equal celerity to meet with dismissal, as the sight of Rachel's quivering eyelid, whenever any theme, however distantly referring to days gone by—the days of the last two years—were alluded to. Mrs. Egerton's, no less than St. Clair's names, were too closely united with past memories for one scarcely less than another to recall aught but heart-rending reminiscences. May had, therefore, determined on waiting a while ere the news she had to communicate was unfolded to her sister. Time, meanwhile, the earthly wayfarer's unfailing consoler, would come to Rachel's rescue; and, it might be,—for May still clung to the future possibility for hope of which her own life's meed of joy had been sacrificed,—bring along with him a less stern oblivion; namely, the resurrection of a now to all outward appearance, buried happiness.

St. Clair would not always remain abroad, home duties and responsibilities must in time recall him. Adelaide's return to England would facilitate their future meetings. He would find Rachel more perfect, more lovable than ever; but not yet! Time for one, time for two, time for all three of them! Mr. Egerton had talked of two or three years to come—had requested his proposal, whether accepted

or otherwise, might, if possible, for the present remain a secret except to her sister. That was left an open question, though the writer's earnest wish, as regarded that dear sister's knowledge of the tie now between them, shone forth pretty distinctly in every other sentence of his manly, straightforward love-epistle. "And, by the bye," said May, "his wish should be complied with—his messages of brotherly affection delivered; but not yet—not yet;" and in that first reply of hers, that calmly though tremulously written reply, she had begged of him, for the present, to write to her as of old, betraying not to her sister by word or expression the tie now existing between them. Rachel's health, and the desire to shield her for the next few months from any further excitement than that already caused by their mother's death, was quite sufficient excuse for this arrangement, than which none had ever, heretofore, been more implicitly obeyed.

Mr. Egerton's letters by the last two mails had been more than usually, more even than necessarily, subdued in character. As to May, her letters, even in the brightness of Haseldyne existence, had more frequently been laid open to the charge of coldness, want of affection, &c. &c., than that of ultra-demonstrativeness; and then, some people, try as they will, cannot write sentimentally; it is a sheer impossibility, and, like all impossibilities, must sooner or later be looked upon, both by writer and receiver, as inevitable. May Templeton's epistles, grumbled her friends, were such terribly icy affairs, so provokingly frigid in expression; one never seemed to get any farther with her. Two or three of her "intimate acquaintance" went so far as to use serious remonstrance on this point with the writer. May, of course, apologized—had never intended to give offence, least of all to inflict pain or annoyance; and then, with her old aggravating perverseness, committed a similar atrocity in her next correspondence. Some way or other,

Miss Templeton, in this respect, could not improve. Her pen refused to write "dearest" when only "dear" was intended; or "darling" when only "dearest," or "deeply regret," when even "sorry" was barely compatible with truth, or "yours very affectionately" when "truly or sincerely" indicated her real feeling more correctly. In fact, the long and the short of the matter consisted in this:—May Templeton was a reserved, cold-hearted girl; the world had long enough ago pronounced her sentence, and the world, as we all know, never errs: "Vox populi vox Dei."

But to return to our lady friends, whom we have very unpolitely left standing all this time in the streets of Valetta—at which fair city they had, about a week previous to the Feast of the Annunciation, taken up their residence, after a day or two's indecision on the part of Mrs. Cunningham, in one of the villas on the opposite shore, in preference to Valetta itself. After wandering about for an hour or two, and making various purchases, Rachel proposed going into a jeweller's, for information as to the nearest way to the harbour, anxious to meet Angelo there ere the hour appointed had expired; in which case their courier, knowing pretty well by this time the vagaries one of his party was subject to, might conclude they had already taken boat and crossed to their home unescorted. The jeweller was, at the moment of their entrance, engaged with a young Englishman, to whom he was descanting on the distinctive merits of a large assortment of silver crosses, and other articles of Maltese workmanship lying on the counter. On hearing Rachel make the inquiry respecting the pier, and the nearest way thither, from some assistant standing near, the young Englishman started, and, turning round with a look of mingled astonishment and delight—it would be difficult to say which predominated—advanced towards our visitors.

Augusta was the first to descry her torment and playfellow Frank Egerton; for he, and none other, once more stood before them; and elevating both hands and eyes to the ceiling, she demanded, by all the gold-fields in Australia, whence the apparition before her had sprung. It certainly bore the appearance of an old and very disagreeable cousin, whom she believed to have been long ago transported beyond the seas for capital crime; but could it be possible that unhappy individual had already contrived to elude transatlantic vigilance, and was returning, bent, no doubt, on hatching fresh mischief, to his native land? Rachel's greeting was of a somewhat opposite character to her saucy companion's. Advancing in her old childish way, both hands stretched out, she welcomed dear Mr. Egerton once more to England; and then, with a blushing laugh at her stupid mistake, changed the word into Malta, "only Mr. Egerton had carried her back for a moment to dear old smoky London." "To say nothing," chimed in Augusta, "of having altogether turned her brain;" the mode of address, just adopted towards that unhappy convict too clearly proving the melancholy fact. Whatever effect, according to Augusta, this sudden meeting of her cousin might have had on Rachel's brain, to Mr. Egerton himself the whole affair appeared to have occasioned little short of the uttermost bewilderment. He looked from Rachel to Augusta, and back again from Augusta to Rachel, with an expression denoting, as the former insisted, nothing less than a tacit acknowledgment of the villany laid by her to his charge. As, however, fortunately for their individual comfort—hers and Miss Templeton's—he had turned up in exact time to be useful, they would condescend to employ him, providing he would endeavour to collect a few ideas, have the politeness to offer his arm, try to look one degree less like a patient from some lunatic asylum, and, finally, escort them.

at his convenience to the shore, and from thence, if not too much trouble, home to the opposite one, where mamma would soon poetize his mental faculties back into proper order.

Making a desperate attempt, and rather, it must be confessed, a futile one, at some playful repartee, Frank Egerton, without delay, prepared to fulfil Miss Cunningham's behests, and offered his arm to Rachel; Augusta preferring to leave the other unpinioned, by coming up solo quick march behind. The trio proceeded along the white-stoned, gay-looking, though narrowly-built stradas of Valetta to the place of embarkment, at which rendezvous Angelo had been lingering the last three-quarters of an hour, whiling away the time by chaffing first one and then another polacca-rower on the inferiority of their gaily-painted little barquettes, in comparison with the gondolas of fair Italy, Angelo's native country. Twenty minutes of Maltese rowing, or rather, boat-propelling—the accomplishment scarcely deserving any other name—and our three voyagers found themselves securely landed at the Citta Vittoriosa, and in a marvellously short time afterwards, thanks to Augusta's rapid movements, panting and breathless in Mrs. Cunningham's presence. They found that lady in a reclining position, looking, if possible, more die-away than was customary; apostrophizing Rachel as a fragile creature, far too fragile for exposure to the annihilating heat of Valetta's sun, and her Augusta as a cruel wicked pet for having beguiled the delicate child thither that scorching morning. Mrs. Cunningham languidly extended her hand—what lily dare compete with its whiteness?—to Mr. Egerton, the truant of truants, the blamable, but deeply-valued runaway from her, alas! now far-off native land; but she would not detain him at present with selfish reminiscences. He, no less than her beloved Augusta and dear young friend Miss Templeton, must

need a little sublunary refreshment. They would find the luncheon-table spread below ; after which repast she must positively insist upon Augusta's allowing that sweet girl Rachel a few hours' repose. To this command, however, Miss Cunningham appeared by no means willing to yield submission. Neither Rachel nor herself was the least fatigued ; all they wanted was a little prog, and their own way. The idea, indeed, of remaining in doors to-day, when so much was going on ! They fully intended visiting at least half a dozen more churches before the evening.

"Now, my dear, Mr. Egerton ; I appeal to your well-known sense !" faintly ejaculated Mrs. Cunningham. "Is it not downright madness, for my sweet girls to venture out at present ? My sweet Augusta is so wondrously enthusiastic, so devotedly attached to the beautiful, either in the world of nature, or art, that she really is wearing herself into fragments ; and the result will be," raising the tiniest of lace pocket-handkerchiefs to her eyes, "one her anguished mother dares not even contemplate. Ah, Mr. Egerton, pray assist me in persuading my Augusta not thus to endanger her precious health."

Mr. Egerton, thus appealed to, and observing also that, however free Miss Cunningham might herself be from fatigue, Rachel was looking pallid and tired, proposed good-naturedly for the ladies to rest an hour or two, while he went over to inquire at what time the vespers at St. John's commenced that afternoon, to which service if agreeable, he would return and escort them ; and being quite at home in Valetta, would devote himself to their ciceroneship the remainder of the day.

"Well, at all events let us have something to eat," replied Augusta, to whom her cousin's proposal, though not altogether in accordance with her original intention of returning to Valetta immediately, sounded tolerably satisfactory.

"What shall we send you, mamma; or, have you already lunched?"

"No, my Augusta; anxiety for your return forbade the idea of taking food, and even now a glass of iced champagne, and the merest atom of sponge-biscuit, is all I feel inclined for; small, indeed, is the nourishment this tropical climate will allow me to subsist upon."

Rachel, who had been witness to a large plate of fricasseed chicken on its way to Mrs. Cunningham's bedroom that morning, naturally stared at the announcement; while Augusta ran laughing down stairs, declaring that whatever other people's appetites, under tropical suns might be, hers partook of a London sparrow's voracity in the depth of an unusually bad winter.

Mr. Egerton kept his word, and came at four o'clock for the promised escort to vespers; "not, however, to the church of St. John," said Mr. Egerton; "the music of the one of the Dominican Fathers being many degrees superior, he would conduct them thither;" and turning towards that quarter of Valetta where stands the ancient hospital of the knights, passing by the church and college of the Jesuits, our friends entered another large ecclesiastical building in the opposite street. The scene within was an imposing one. The whole choir being filled with Dominican Fathers in the white habit of their order, their capuce, or hood, being pulled over the head. In the simple though majestic chants used in this order, the choir poured forth the vespers for the day. That function ended, compline instantly commenced, and at the close, instead of returning in order from the choir, after the custom of other religious orders, the monks fell into procession down the church, singing, as they proceeded, the "Salve Regina;" their voices sank on reaching the extremity of the middle aisle, then returning swelled out again, "Et Jesum, benedic-

tum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende ; O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria !” the prior blessing and sprinkling each kneeling figure with holy water. Here the service concluded.

“That was really a noble function, Frank,” observed Miss Cunningham, on regaining the street ; “but I suppose the same ceremonies as those we have just witnessed do not take place on ordinary occasions, only on particular feasts, such as the one celebrated to-day.”

Not so, was Mr. Egerton’s reply ; the procession of the “Salve” was the same all the year round. There were many traditions connected with this ceremony, and carefully treasured up by the order. One of these alleged, that when St. Dominic, their earthly founder, was repeating the “Salve” after compline one evening, the Blessed Mother, at the words ‘*Eia ergo advocata nostra,*’ appeared in human form and granted his request ; henceforward it became a precept of the order always to sing the “Salve” after compline in procession.

Augusta having inquired for another legend on the subject, Mr. Egerton related the one of the Forty Martyrs ; which being, perhaps, unknown to some of our readers, we will here transcribe.

A town in Poland, in which was situated a Dominican monastery, having been sacked by the heathen, forty among St. Dominic’s disciples became miraculously warned of their being selected for martyrdom, and joyfully did those bold, brave hearts receive the news. How to be accomplished they were not informed. The day appointed passed, evening came, and still their crown tarried ; each office was said, each duty duly completed, and the compline hour having arrived, they prayed for “a quiet night, and a perfect end ;” and with the “*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum,*” resigned their souls, either for life or death, into a

Father's hands. Then began the "Salve" procession, and perfect tranquillity reigned through the church, till the religious gained the Lady Chapel, when the doors were burst open and their enemies entered. For a moment they paused, awestruck by those kneeling figures in their white robes; those angel-voices faltering not as they chanted out more loudly than before, "*Et Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui.*" The barbarians' pause was, however, but momentary, the monks were slaughtered on the spot, and still singing they died. One alone shrank back, his human heart faltered, and he was about to fly; but no, he looked once more towards his brethren, he beheld the mangled bodies still singing in tones, not of earth, the interrupted "Salve;" whereupon the monk was coward no longer, but returning from his hiding-place, joined the white-robed army of martyrs, and as year by year the day comes round on which they won their crowns, the faithful who worship in Dominican churches pray, in the words of the Missal, that their eyes also may one day behold the Child of Mary; for these last words of the martyrs are woven into the collect for their festival.

Neither Augusta nor Rachel was ever tired of sight-seeing, and day after day Mr. Egerton's services as escort were gratefully accepted. Her cousin's stay at Malta not being likely to be of much longer continuance was also another inducement, in Augusta's opinion, for making the most of his society. His employer's affairs (Mr. Egerton having become commission-agent to an extensive mercantile establishment in Adelaide) having been transacted in the island, the next orders were to proceed to Lisbon, and from thence to Paris and London; returning to Adelaide with all the speed business (pleasure or amusement being left to chance) would allow of.

"A tolerably fair explanation of his wanderings, after

all," said Augusta, who, after a long and close course of catechizing, at length made herself mistress of the above information.

"A fair enough explanation, in truth, of his wandering propensities, had any been needed," thought Rachel also, but not of another and far greater perplexity, one she was wholly at a loss to account for—Mr. Egerton's altered manner towards herself; for poor Rachel, though by no means a ready hand at imaginary causes of annoyance on the part of her friends, could not but observe with some degree of surprised vexation a constraint and embarrassment in Frank Egerton's present behaviour, never before, from the first moment of their acquaintance, visible. Though goodnatured and obliging as ever, an unaccountable fit of shyness and gravity had taken the place of his former gaiety and unreserve. At first, whenever her sister's name was mentioned Mr. Egerton had brightened up and begun to talk in his old boyish way of past happy days in England; but discovering, in his turn, that Rachel, he knew not why, shrank from any lengthened conversation on these points, he now always managed to change the subject or rather to give it up altogether by relapsing into silence. Whatever cause might exist for this conduct on the part of Mr. Egerton, it served both to pique and interest Rachel more than, perhaps, she was herself aware of; but is not this ever the case in a greater or less degree with all of us under similar circumstances? At what period are one's friendships more attractive than when on the apparent decline? When does smile and kindly greeting, carelessly enough regarded awhile ago, become watched for, treasured up with a sort of miserly eagerness as when the said smile has, for some reason or other, perchance through our own folly or heedlessness, become of rare occurrence.

• What could be the matter with Mr. Egerton? pondered

Rachel ; what cause, even inadvertently, could she possibly have given for this extraordinary abruptness, even coldness of manner towards herself ? It was so absurdly unlike the Frank Egerton of former days, and must proceed from some secret spring of annoyance, given to him, perhaps, in either May's letter or her own from England. She had often feared he must think her letters, at all events, lifeless and devoid of interest. Her mind had been so absorbed in other things, and woe betide far-away friends when that is the case at home : indeed, of late she had ceased to write to Australia at all, and had left the whole correspondence to May. There was nothing to tell him when mamma was gone, and no one he much cared for left in England, but still she ought to have written sometimes ; it was selfish and forgetful to have given up writing altogether : doubtless Mr. Egerton had so regarded her omission, little knowing—and Rachel's sigh was an aching one—little knowing the excuses for it—how sadly little in our condemnation of others are these ever allowed for ! She felt, nevertheless, like a culprit, did poor silly little Rachel—on this score, at all events, if on no other : and at length arrived at the brave determination, time and opportunity permitting, of opening the subject point-blank with Mr. Egerton. A more laudable decision could not well have been arrived at—the phantom misunderstanding being never so easily put to flight as by a little mutual explanation and candour, joined to one, if not both parties' confession of having been just an atom in the wrong—no such frightful humiliation after all, and a remedy ten thousand times preferable to the fashionable disease, or rather monomania, known by the name of heartburn. Mr. Egerton was, on his part, equally anxious with Rachel all this time for the above much-to-be-wished-for, but quite as difficult-to-be-obtained, private interview with May Templeton's little

sister. A hundred questions had to be asked and replied to ere the depression and embarrassment, now hanging like a veil between his present or future intercourse with the Templetons, could be dispersed. When, oh! when would Augusta's present fervour subside, and a better chance exist of seeing Rachel alone? To ask for a formal interview with her was impossible. That tormenting and tolerably clear-sighted cousin of his would guess (upon the whole naturally enough) something in the wind immediately. And Frank Egerton had reasons of his own for not awakening at present Miss Cunningham's suspicions in that quarter; there was nothing left for it but patience—patience, that old tiresome word, would poor Frank Egerton often exclaim—long ere this ought the lesson to have been learnt by heart, considering the many a weary day spent in the acquirement.

In addition to other difficulties the hour of his ship's departure from Malta, though not yet agreed upon, could not be far distant; interview or no interview he must start on its arrival. How far fortune intended to befriend his case ere the hour approached, or destiny persuade her to turn trifier, time alone would decide, and time's decision must be accepted.

It being Lent and the Maltese an extremely religious people,—their land "the Isle of Faith,"—the church services were of frequent occurrence, more especially during the Holy Week; our friends attended most of the ceremonies. Augusta, till her visit abroad, never having been present at these services, was attracted by the novelty of a ceremonial which, to the generality of English travellers, according to their own account, too often appears little less than senseless mummery, simply because they do not give themselves the trouble of gaining information, and being already steeped in prejudice are only too well predisposed to condemn unquestioned; a course of proceeding, which, applied to any

other subject would by Englishmen be accused of unfairness ; with this one, however, justice—even England's boasted justice—can afford to play tricks. The bare possibility of every, even the apparently most unmeaning, ceremony of the Catholic Church, being in reality a channel of light and beauty, displaying at every turn hidden treasures of Holy Scripture, is derided *in toto*—idolatry—superstition—absurdity, in fact, no term is considered too extravagant when applied to a ceremonial that is absolutely an enigma to one uneducated in the faith thus ruthlessly condemned. Not according to these rules, however, did our blunt friend Augusta Cunningham proceed. The multitude's any more than the individual's opinion, as we had once before occasion to observe, was not her Deity : religion like everything else deserved a fair hearing, and a fair hearing it should have. Catholic services were, as the language of a foreign country would naturally be, strange to her, but not, for that reason, incapable of interpretation. Poetry and romance were not, as this young lady has more than once informed us, in her line ; but that kneeling congregation—that crowd of mendicants, beggars, street-sweepers, men and women, ragged, destitute, old, withered, and, if externals could be relied on, hopelessly miserable—engaged in one act of intense adoration, flocking by dozens to the very altar, a class she had believed cast out of respectable society altogether—the very refuse of its thoroughfares, here feeding on the Bread of Life—a sight continually before her eyes when accompanying Rachel, for want of something else to do, in her daily attendance at Mass,—there was no humbug in that sort of thing settled Augusta ; and yet had she always till now believed popery to be made up of flowers and nonsense. Whence had arisen the motive for misleading her ? why not in describing the dark side of a system, if dark side there were, point not to the bright also ? Her idol had been in-

sulted—truth had been tampered with. Henceforth on these, as on other, points she would judge for herself.

Holy Week passed quickly away, too quickly for our Maltese sight-seers, who would fain have prolonged its stay for another eight days at least. They witnessed the Blessing and Procession of Palms on the preceding Sunday, and heard the mournful “Tenebræ” chanted as the solemn day drew on; and on Maunday Thursday beheld the violet of Lent laid aside, the altars clothed in white, the long-silent “Gloria in Excelsis,” together with joyous ringing of bells at the commencement, appearing to tell them that already had the Church’s sorrow fled away, and Her joy begun. So, perchance, on their first communion-day thought the Apostles of Galilee. But even as they went forth unto the Mount of Olives, so forth from the altar did their followers wend their way this day, while with canopy and thurible, and “Pange Lingua,” not more sweet than mournful, they carried the Most Holy to His resting-place—the one day’s Gethsemane—before which watchers, like Peter, James, and John, the favoured three, at the gate of another Gethsemane took their places, while from that time forth, through day and night, as each hour struck, others approached, and bending low, signified to the preceding adorers that they also had come hither to watch with Him for “one hour.” On Good Friday the Sacred Host was again carried back to the high altar, and the Mass of the Presanctified immediately followed. Then came the uncovering and adoration of the cross—veiled since Passion Sunday—and while the faithful, each kneeling three separate times, admitted to kiss the symbol of redemption, approached the recumbent cross, like the wailing of souls, poured forth the *reproaches*,—no better name could have been devised,—“Oh, my people, what have I done to thee? or wherein have I wearied thee?”

Answer me." The service over, the altars were stripped, the tabernacle left open, the lamp extinguished, the high altar passed and repassed for once in the year without genuflection, and desolation reigned around,—desolation of which none but a Catholic heart, accustomed as it is to the perpetual presence of the Blessed Sacrament, can form the remotest conception. On Holy Saturday or Easter Eve, after witnessing the blessing of the fonts and Paschal candle, and hearing the first Easter Alleluia, Mr. Egerton proposed a drive to Città Vecchia, the ancient capital of Malta ere the Knights of St. John took possession of the island; St. Paul's Cave, the one in which, says tradition, the apostle took shelter after his shipwreck, "near the island called Malta," being the chief point of interest. The services of a priest, attached to the cathedral-church, and offering to conduct our Valetta party to the cave in question, were gratefully accepted. At the foot of a rugged flight of steps leading to the cave, and down which it was difficult, from the darkness, to descend, the priest lit a torch, by this means discovering to their view one of the fairest specimens of sculptured genius his visitors had ever set eyes on,—a life-size figure, chiseled in transparent marble, of the Gentile's apostle; the hand from which the viper has been shaken into the fire extended, as though to prove its safety.

"Could any thing be more celestial than the expression?" exclaimed Mr. Egerton, as, forgetting any thing like coldness, he turned towards Rachel.

"No, indeed," was her equally enthusiastic reply. "One could almost fancy the lips would move and pronounce aloud some of the impassioned words of his epistles: such as, 'Who shall separate us? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors.'"

Mr. Egerton looked at Rachel more steadfastly than

usual, as she uttered these words, surprised by the unwonted energy of tone and manner lately, in comparison with the past, so strongly subdued; the torchlight fell full upon her radiant face and hair; never before, thought Mr. Egerton, had he seen Rachel look half as beautiful. Her expression for the moment appeared to have caught the inspiration of the apostle's, and to be saying with him,—“Yes, and I too, though all but a child—a weak trembling woman—I too can pronounce these words: ‘Who shall separate me? Nay, I am more than conqueror through Him that hath loved me; for through weakness is not His strength ever made perfect?’”

From the cave their conductor, providing each lady and gentleman with a lighted torch, led the way to the catacombs, built long after St. Paul's visit to Malta, and used by the early Christians in times of persecution as churches and places of refuge; many of them being supposed, the priest said, to be buried here. A subterranean passage to Valetta, a distance of six miles, lay at the extremity of this labyrinth; for labyrinth, a dark and narrow one withal, might these catacombs more properly be designated.

On the way home to Valetta our party were met by Mr. Cunningham, on horseback, expressing with much glee his delight at having eluded a host of morning visitors at Città Vittarosa, with the assurance of a prior engagement to meet his daughter and friends on their return from Città Vecchia. He also ventured to hope that by this time Augusta and Rachel had seen enough churches, museums, and caves for the remainder of their lives; for his part, neither in one nor the other did he find the slightest amusement; a good day's sail on the Mediterranean being his only attraction at Malta. Would they like next week to attend a ball on board the *Argus*, a ship bound for India,

then stationed in harbour, the officers of which, capital fellows, by-the-by, had formed his acquaintance,—or did they intend to live in church for ever ?

“ Oh, no,” said both ladies, smiling ; “ they should like extremely to attend a naval ball, never having been present at anything of the kind.”

Mr. Cunningham, charmed by their compliance, rode off at once to accept the capital fellows’ invitation. Mrs. Cunningham, as they discovered on reaching home, had also been making innumerable engagements for the coming week ; a ball at her own house being talked of in the following one, so that having made such good use of their time through Lent became a cause of real congratulation to one, if not both, of our church-going young ladies. At three A.M. on Easter morning, a simultaneous burst of melody from all the bells in Valetta, accompanied by the report of cannon from the fort, announced the commencement of the paschal festivities. At nine a procession similar to the one already described in detail, started from St. John’s ; the Sacred Host Itself, borne in the arms of the bishop, being carried round the town, and the crowds, instead of standing, as at the procession on the feast of the Annunciation, kneeling, in profound adoration, whenever It passed along.

After vespers Augusta, seized by a sudden fit of parental affection, expressed her determination of taking a long walk with papa ; and a long walk in company with Mr. and Miss Cunningham being, as the latter was well aware, no joke to people of Rachel’s constitution, a stroll on the sea-shore, under charge of Mr. Egerton, was proposed, and gladly acceded to by Miss Templeton. Papa and herself, added Augusta, would return by the shore, in order to meet them ; and the whole four embarked for Città Vittarosa in company. Mr. Egerton said nothing to his fair cousin’s

arrangement, except what politeness suggested in the way of acquiescence. His long-wished-for interview with Rachel was on the point of accomplishment, and when our hopes verge on their fulfilment we are apt to be silent. Answered hopes are to some minds like answered prayers ; and Frank Egerton's were one of these awful responsibilities.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ Make haste . . . the lady said
We are, oh nurse, waking—he and I ;
I on earth—and he in sky,
And thou must help me to o’erlay
With garment white this little clay,
Which needs no more our lullaby.”

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

LONDON once more!—not noisy, bustling London, as we quitted its tumultuous noonday streets a few years since—but, in comparison of that half-forgotten day’s excursion from Belgravia’s well-watered thoroughfares to the less-carefully tended precincts of London Bridge station, quiet,—for it is night, Easter-night in London, Easter meetings concluded, Easter friends gone home ; Lent, penances,—its fasting and privilege, departed in company. The Church and the world, once or twice a year, not only un-antagonistic, but really, on the whole, good hearty friends with each other, determined simultaneously to keep as well as to proclaim High Festival. Six weeks ago, the friendship was a forgotten one, but the house of feasting is better than the house of mourning, Is it not so, gay world ? Away with the antiquated nonsense of a less fashionable theology—experience has proved its unreality. Light the paschal candles!—chant the Easter alleluias! and then let us, unrebuked, for once unmolested, eat—drink—laugh—dance—and be merry !

“ ‘ If ye then be risen with Christ,’ ” whispered a voice ;—
“ nay, nay, no ifs at Easter-tide, stern Mother!—*we have had enough of gloom for one year !* ”

"It was Mozart's fault—he did it, May. I always thought he would. That Twelfth Mass of his; how curious it was, though, my favourite Mass should have done it, after all?"

"Done *what*, Algie?"

"Why, done this, to be sure, May—broken my voice for ever. I heard Dr. Moore say so, just now; though he spoke in a whisper, I heard the words quite plainly. Don't cry, May; I sha'n't mind, if it's good for me. Perhaps you know I was too fond of singing, and made an idol of my music, which was naughty, was it not? A little more lemonade, please, May—this burning thirst is terrible; my throat feels scorching hot, and nothing seems to cool it. Ah, that *is* nice!—you have had it iced, and made without sugar. What a dear, clever little nurse you are, to be sure. Now, raise me up a bit, and let us have a regular jolly chat before this naughty thirst comes back again."

"And get into trouble with Dr. Moore for my pains, Master Algie, after his particular directions to keep a certain young gentleman quiet, and not let him chatter too much," replied the clever little nurse, shaking her head; "a very pretty idea, upon my word."

"Ah, never mind Dr. Moore to-night, May. He forgot it was Easter-day. Easter-day is always a spoiling day; and, besides, I won't talk loud, only I want so much to tell you how it all happened—and that iced stuff has made me feel better already."

"Well, remember, the jolly chat, as you call it, must only last till the hand reaches here," said May, pointing to her watch, and laying it on the bed before Algie, "not a second longer. How I wish you had told Mr. Ring, the choir-master, about that Mass being beyond your voice; he would have given your part to some other boy, you know, darling."

"But it was not beyond my voice at all, dear sister. Some of Beethoven's Masses are much higher, and more difficult. It was only a sort of feeling I had about this one of Mozart's. From the very first time I heard it, long before Mr. Ring let me take the treble part, that music always sent such a curious fluttering feeling here;" and opening the bed-clothes, Algernon pointed to his chest, upon which a quantity of rough ice, wrapped in flannel, had been lately placed."

"But you never felt any pain there before, darling, did you?"

"No; that is, only a very, very little, sometimes, not worth mentioning, when I was tired with racing the boys at school, or playing cricket."

"And when did it begin to-day, Algie, this sharp cutting pain you told me of a little while ago?"

"I hardly remember, because it did not come on all at once. At the 'Kyrie eleison' I felt quite strong and well; and through the first part of the 'Gloria in excelsis;' but towards the end—yes, I recollect, that was the first time, when we got to the highest part—'Tu solus sanctus, Tu solus altissimus Jesu Christe'—a sharp pain, almost like a blow, struck me here, and nearly took my breath away for a moment."

"And yet you went on singing, Algie; I heard your voice clear on to the end. I wonder how you managed not to leave off altogether."

"Leave off, indeed!" said Algernon, in true schoolboy scorn, at any one's imagining such a proceeding. "The idea of leaving off singing in the middle of the 'Gloria' because of a little stupid pain! Don't you know I mean to be a soldier by-and-by, when I'm grown up as big as Arthur, and a pretty coward of a one I should make if I were to be such a baby as that at ten years old. I went on singing

just the same as if nothing had happened, of course; perhaps you'll ask next, why I didn't ask Mr. Ring to let me leave the choir when the sermon began?"

"Well, you have just guessed my question, Algie. It would have been much better, and might have saved all this."

"Why, goodness, May, I never saw such a funny girl in my life as you are! What would have become of the singing if I had? None of the other boys knew my part, and the basses could'nt very well sing treble, could they, if they were ever so clever. Besides, I would not for the world have given up singing High Mass on Easter Sunday, unless I was downright forced to do it. So you see I did something much better: I asked God to let me go on, and the pain got better very soon afterwards. I scarcely felt it at all through the 'Credo,' and not much at the offertory or 'Sanctus.' It got very bad again, I must own, at the 'Agnus Dei'—the beginning, at least; but when we reached the 'Dona nobis pacem,' I could have gone on singing for ever. Ah! May, how sweet those words sounded this morning! and when the kiss of peace passed from one priest to another, and on to the rest of the choir, it seemed—the *peace* did, I mean—to float down the church, and through the door, into the great world beyond. No, no, it was not the *music*, May; it was the *peace*, only I don't know exactly how to describe what I mean—and then the incense, I suppose, (there were such clouds of it this morning) made me faint and I fell down; but it did not signify then, for Mass was over, and no more singing wanted. How luckily my voice did not break before Easter. Now, May, how silly you are to begin crying again, as if boy's voices did not always break some time or other; besides, now I can be an acolyte, and can wave the thurible, instead of being in choir. I scarcely know which is the best, being an acolyte or a chorister,

both are so nice. Ah! May," concluded the child, laying back wearily on his pillow quite tired with his long story, "will you ever forget Mozart's 'Agnus Dei' at St. Mary's to-day?"

Forget it! she was not very likely. Let twenty—fifty—future Easter Sundays come and go, and the one now passing away as the cathedral clock struck eleven—would stand out in vivid colouring from among them. The thrilling tones of the choristers, little Algernon's high above the rest, as again and again their pleading 'Agnus Dei' had reiterated through the cathedral, while the rise and fall of the yet more imploring 'Dona nobis pacem'—the last cadence dying imploringly away into a stillness all but sensible—would be still ringing in her ear. Nor was the heavy fall in the choir immediately succeeding, causing the already anxious sister, with a feeling of undefined apprehension, to rise and follow other members of the congregation into the sacristy, there to find the object of her forebodings, his surplice spotted with blood, in the arms of Mr. Ring, the child's well-beloved choir-master—less likely to be forgotten any more than her feeling of relief at the said Mr. Ring's look of proud delight, who, having succeeded in arousing his white-faced little pupil to consciousness, was by no means prepared to allow the possibility, now passed from mouth to mouth, of Mozart's music having overtaken the boy's strength.

"Nothing less probable," declared Mr. Ring—the heat of the day—the scent from the flowers and incense—or indeed any other suggestion in favour of Algernon's sudden illness being far more in accordance with Mr. Ring's ideas than any want of strength in his head pupil's musical possibilities.

Had any other proof been wanting, Algernon's declaration of being quite well again, and able to get home without

the assistance of a cab, added to his earnest entreaty after an hour or two's rest, of being allowed to return to church for vespers and benediction, was considered more than sufficient; and the choir-master having finally seen his favourite safely home, and established fast asleep on the drawing-room sofa, and being, good man, a better adept in the science of music than that of medicine, had departed fully assured, not only of Algernon's speedy recovery, but of his being competent, ere the lapse of another week or two to rejoin the choir at St. Mary's. Not so Algernon's sister, however, to whom the child's seizure had been a greater cause of alarm than surprise. His increasing delicacy of constitution having, during the course of the last twelve months, occasioned her no little anxiety; up to that period he had been equally strong with any other boy of his age. A bright rosy-cheeked little fellow, with untiring spirits, but of late he had, without any apparent cause much changed in appearance. The unboy-like gravity of expression his face would at times assume, the blue veins standing out in transparent contrast against the ivory forehead; the cheek (except when he was singing, on which occasions always crimsoned, with streak-like symptoms of excitement) unnaturally pallid, were sufficient indications of debility, if not of positive disease, to excite May's sisterly apprehensions. The advice—for spite Algernon's playful attempts at resistance—advice she insisted upon procuring for him—was of a nature more easily given than enforced. The boy must be kept quiet—must not over-exert himself either in mind or body; relax his daily studies; take an extra quantity of nourishment; and last, not least, swallow as many doses of that most delightful of all beverages cod-liver oil as the young gentleman could manage to imbibe without nausea; in which case the said medicine must be discontinued. Thanks to the young gentleman's soldier-

like propensities, however, the concluding direction proved the one most easily obeyed.

"It was nasty, very nasty, certainly," said Algernon, "but then soldiers must be brave; he would have to do harder things some of these days, would the future captain, may be Colonel Templeton, than merely swallow a dose of stupid medicine; but when lying on the sofa an hour at a time, less frequent games at cricket with Edwin Markham, and races in which he, Edwin, and one or two other chosen 'fellows' were the ordinary winners, and above all, an afternoon's attendance at school only, were in accordance with medical orders laid before Algie as matters of obedience, a thousand difficulties appeared in view. There was nothing soldier-like in proceedings such as these, and all the boy's affection for his sister had to be put in practice ere an uncomplaining submission to these most unpalatable commands could be effected. At May's one sentence, 'for *my* sake, Algie,' however, the rising rebellion was always subdued; the naughty cross words forced back, for he loved May more than cricket, more even than the park races with Edwin Markham. They were all in all to each other now. The brother and sister, or mother and child, as almost in appearance, and certainly in all practised and loving reality, the two had since Mrs. Templeton's death become.

To keep Algernon from his singing class, let prudence and doctors say what they would, was a harder task, however, than even May's courage could attempt. Any directions up to this point were firmly enforced, and though gently so, yet with uncompromising exactness; but here they must come to a stand-still. The proposal to give up his singing-class would have broken Algernon's heart, and robbed his life of half its sunshine. She pleaded this point with the doctor, and without much difficulty gained a concession. The singing-class was declared to be of minor

importance, especially if to abandon it would cause so much unhappiness. Let him attend twice instead of three times a week; and Algernon was obliged to be satisfied.

All through Lent the choir had been more than usually busy, practising for the Easter services, and May's fears lest Algernon should over-exert himself had every week increased. The evening he was kept from choir must not be wasted at home. This anthem, and that new hymn, had to be learnt perfectly, and once let Algernon take possession of the piano, and the chances of driving him away under a good two hours' practice became questionable. The best May could do towards keeping up her singing-bird's (a name given to Algie in days of Adelaide and St. Clair's memory) strength consisted in preparing jellies, *blanc-manges*, and other attractive articles of strengthening diet, in hopes therewith to tempt the sickly appetite seldom now anxious for meal time, and not always, spite of "May's cooking," to be beguiled into a fancied hunger.

Easter eve had been a busy no less than a fatiguing day at St. Mary's, church decorations being, as all ever engaged in the work will acknowledge (even though blessed with strong health and spirits) a considerable pull upon one's physical energies. The choristers and acolytes were, as a matter of course, enlisted in the service; Algernon at the head of the party, he having, for the last two months, saved up every sixpence of pocket-money, alias "weekly allowance," for the altar decorations on Easter Sunday. Not that St. Clair's parting gift was by any means exhausted, but as Algernon observed to May, giving other people's money to the Church, though very pleasant, was not quite the same thing as saving up one's own. Neither had Mrs. St. Aubyn or May, assisted by other ladies of the congregation, been behind hand, either in their horticultural gifts or personal handywork for the next day's festival.

May had been roused from slumber at five o'clock on Easter morning by a kiss on the forehead, and a child's by no means *sotto voce* whisper in her ear of "Christ is risen. alleluia!"

"He is risen, indeed," was the only half-awake reply, for yesterday's exertions were scarcely yet slept out. "Why, dearest Algie, how early you are; and what a lovely *bouquet*. Oh, a present for me, Algie. Why, really I had quite forgotten it was my birthday. How good of you to remember it, my singing-bird. Always thinking about poor May. What would she do without you?" And at six o'clock they were kneeling side by side at the altar of St. Mary's—it being the little chorister's first Communion-day. Never had a London breakfast table, or a country one's either, been surrounded by happier guests than the one in Hamilton-street that Easter morning.

Old Phœbe, in honour of Easter-day and Miss May's birthday falling this year into each other's lap, had been invited to take hers up stairs, arrayed in the cherry-ribbon coloured cap chosen by Algernon himself, and presented to Phœbe for an Easter present—quite as much to poor old Phœbe's horror at the idea of being decked out that fashion, as her delight at the child's thoughtfulness and affection.

Household arrangements having come to a conclusion, the trio leaving Phœbe's silent friend to mind the house in her absence, had once more set off for St. Mary's, meeting on the road thither with Mr. and Mrs. St. Aubyn, who had, contrary to usual custom, walked down to High Mass at St. Mary's—Mozart's Twelfth being as great a favourite with Mr. St. Aubyn and his wife, as with May and Algernon, the latter having given timely information to May's "pet friend"—as the saucy boy called her—of that being the music chosen for to-day; in reward for which piece of gallantry the young gentleman, with the other choristers,

had been invited to spend the evening at Mrs. St. Aubyn's house on the ensuing Monday—a treat looked forward to by the whole party with no small amount of pleasure, May's "pet friend" being an unusual favourite with children of all classes.

During the service, May, whose seat was not far distant from the choir, had watched Algernon with an almost painful interest. He had seldom, so she fancied, looked more delicate; but then, to be sure, people said—Mrs. St. Aubyn even among them—that she was growing fanciful about Algernon, and would only injure the child and herself by over-anxiety; besides, his voice, except at one or two intervals had never sounded in better or stronger tune. Once or twice, indeed, she afterwards remembered, it had a little faltered, and at the concluding notes of the oft-repeated "*Et Incarnatus est ex Mariâ Virgine*," had become almost inaudible. But then in May's opinion those words could never be too undertoned, and admiration at the boy's exquisite taste, rather than any fear for his strength, had been the result, especially when, at the "*Vitam venturi sæculi*," a moment afterwards, the treble voices had seemed to pierce the roof and soar away somewhere or other beyond. Little dreamt May at the commencement of the "*Agnus Dei*" that her singing-bird's last notes in this world so neared their completion.

Yet thus it was, a few hours afterwards, as the child had overheard Dr. Moore, the physician, who, owing to Mr. Dalton's absence from town, had been called in, tell his sister in the ante-chamber.

"Is there any danger?" May had inquired, following the speaker to the door.

"Not immediate," had been the reply, accompanied by an assurance of worse cases than Algernon's having, by dint of care and watching, entirely recovered. "It all depended

on the boy's constitution, and he should strongly recommend Miss Templeton to keep a good heart up, and hope for the best."

At twelve o'clock, May persuaded Phœbe, her fellow-nurse, to take a few hours' rest, promising, were anything wanted, to call her up without fail; but the doctor having announced no immediate danger at hand, their wiser plan would consist in dividing the night nursing between them. She would rouse Phœbe at daybreak, and then resign her own post till the usual breakfast hour. Hour after hour passed, and the night-nurse still kept vigil—but not alone! Two bright, though unseen ones, watched beside her. One of these bent sorrowfully over May, while the face of the other glistened, as with folded arms he stood near Algie. As the Abbey clock struck three, the boy, awaking from the doze into which, at the conclusion of the foregoing conversation, he had fallen, turned restlessly, and, complaining of severe pain in the left side, and return of the parching thirst, begged, as a little change, to be lifted into mamma's dear old arm-chair out there by the window, but was easily persuaded, however, to substitute a more modern and somewhat less cumbersome one, in the shape of May herself, who, climbing up behind the bolster, managed at one and the same time both to prop up, and amuse, by this novel invention, the weary little patient in front.

"How clever you are, May! It does me so much good," was the rewarding assurance, as the boy stretched out his small fevered hand to search for his sister's. "Do you know, May," he continued, "I have just been thinking what a very, very happy life mine has been altogether. It has really been cram full of happinesses. I have been trying to count them up the last half-hour, while you fancied I was dozing. I have been counting the differences between the happinesses and the unhappinesses, because, of course, there

have been a few of the others as well—some great and some little ones. First, you know, came dear papa's death—rest in peace, dear papa! That was a great unhappiness. And then leaving poor Haseldyne—that was not a little one, either, was it, May? Then came *her* death," pointing to his mother's picture on the opposite wall; "and Rachel's illness, and St. Clair's leaving England. Do you think that last ought to be reckoned among the great or little sorrows, May, dear? Oh, you don't know! Well, never mind, then, we'll reckon it among the great ones, because St. Clair was so kind to mamma, and so fond of Rachel, and all of us, and Rachel loved him so; and his going away made her get worse than before—at least, so Phœbe and I thought, because Rachel always fell ill, Phœbe said, when she was quite a little girl, if any one she loved very much went away from her. And she could not help loving St. Clair, you know, any more than you or I could help loving him; dear, dear fellow. So you see that, altogether, makes up five great unhappinesses, beside a few little ones, such as not being able, lately, to race and play cricket with Edwin Markham; and the disappointment last summer, when the rain came and stopped our pic-nic to Hampton Court; and my hyacinth being broken that windy day—the day before St. Clair left London—don't you remember, May?—beside a few others I have forgotten, which plainly shows they must have been very little ones indeed, because no one, you know, ever forgets great sorrows. And now, May, for the list—the long list of happinesses. Yes, I will stop talking directly, only just let me count them over first—it is so pleasant! To begin with the great ones, as I did before. First, there are all the times I have sung in choir at High Mass, and Vespers, and Benediction, three times every Sunday, and twice in the week, besides on all the great festivals and days of obligation—the month of Mary and

Octave of Corpus Christi—that makes, you know, altogether—let me see—I have been a chorister three years to-day—so they alone make, altogether five hundred great happinesses; besides all the walks, and pic-nics, and drives, and boating parties, and hay-making, and cowslip, and blackberry gathering parties down at Haseldyne, with papa and mamma, and you, and Rachel, and Arthur, and St. Clair, and dear Lady Adelaide; and then, since we came to London, the games and games I have had with Edwin Markham, and the other boys; and the pleasant evenings at Mrs. St. Aubyn's house, and with Lady Adelaide, and that nice little Italian girl Lucia, who always tells me such pretty real stories about Italy and Florence. Why, I might go on all night, May, if I liked, counting up all these happinesses, only my back aches sadly, and I should like to lie down again, please. Thank you for holding me up all this time, May dear. Don't go away. I do love you so very, very much, almost as much as church. There—there,” and he sank wearily to sleep again, while, more intensely than before, the night-nurse kept her vigil.

And now, bending pityingly towards her, a fellow-watcher whispered in the sister's listening ear,—“These are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, in whose mouth is found no guile.” The procession is not yet completed. The thrice-blessed little ones pause ere they proceed. Their Sanctus lingers. Another voice is needed to swell the chorus. Shall that voice be grudged them, May? No time remained to answer, for Algie again awoke, a look of wonder in his eyes.

“Hark, May—how sweetly the boys are singing at St. Mary's! It is time to go to church—oh, no, we are too late! They are singing the Agnus Dei. Listen, May,—what exquisite music! It is quite a new Mass, better even than Mozart's. I never heard that Agnus Dei before. The

boys must come to teach it me after church. Oh, May, open the window, that I may hear it better."

To please him she went to open it, while the other watcher beside Algie's bed unfolded his wing. The stars shone lustrously enough outside, but May saw them not. She returned swiftly to the bed, though not swiftly enough, for Algernon was gasping—struggling for breath—his hands clenching the bedclothes—every feature convulsed with agony. Seek not—wish not—ask not to detain him here. "Suffer my little children to come unto Me, nor attempt by one wild prayer to keep them from My bosom." So spake a voice to her soul. A voice well known and well beloved, for the sheep never mistake His voice; and though in broken, trembling tones she hastened to obey. The angel watchers knelt beside her—"Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world in the name of God the Father who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of the living God who suffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost who was poured out upon thee; in the name of Angels and Archangels; of the Cherubim and Seraphim; of the Patriarchs and Prophets; of the Apostles and Evangelists, and all the Saints of God;—may thy place be this day in peace, and thy abode in Holy Zion;" but the child's agony ceased not. It was fearful to behold; he moaned with pain; while the glazed eyeballs, a moment before almost unearthly in their beauty, appeared to start from the socket. What could mother's or sister's love avail now when even prayer seemed baffled beneath the power of sin's last dread enemy—and yet, must he part from her *thus*? That were surely too terrible.

The boy's last chanted words that Easter morning flew to May's lip, and, unknown to herself, found utterance: "Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi; dona nobis pacem—pacem—dona nobis pacem." It was over—the struggle

and the agony. Algernon started up ; the voice was ringing as of old :—

“ O, May ! how bright it is. The sun is rising. See, May ! see !—my pain is gone. O May, how glorious ! how beautiful ! Look ! May—look—look—look ! ”

Her eyes followed involuntarily the direction of the small uplifted hand, but nothing was visible. The room was quite dark, except from the faint glimmer of the candle in the distance. She turned back to soothe Algie and hush him to rest. The child's sudden movement had deceived her ; but he was no longer there—hushing no longer needed. Her “ singing-bird ” had flown home ; only its pretty fragile cage lay on the pillow. The small ten years' captive had gone to learn the new “ Agnus Dei ”—in the choir whose song is never ended, and yet never weary, and to help wave the thuribles of undying incense before the Altar of the Eternal Easter, among the acolytes who serve the perpetual High Mass up there.

May shed no tears. The smile on the parted lips forbade all weeping. “ I in Patria,” “ Thou in exile,” was their language now—mute, yet positive.

“ It was Mozart's fault—he did it. That old man who plays the organ at St. Mary's, and teaches the boys to sing so beautifully, Phœbe,” was the latter's greeting, when at sunrise she came uncalled-for to relieve her young mistress's watch, little dreaming what had happened, so wonderfully had her little patient appeared to rally a few hours previously.

“ It was Mozart's fault, I tell you, Phœbe,” continued May, raising her head drearily from Algernon's pillow ; “ why do you not believe what I say ? The old man who plays High Mass at all the churches in London, and wrote his own dirge a few months ago. He is very clever ; but it was cruel of him to kill my singing-bird ; he need not have done that, Phœbe ; need he ? ”

"No more he needn't, deary; but come along, you must lay down a bit now; and I'll send for Lady Adelaide and Miss Lucia; you'll like that, Miss May darling. He was so fond of the little Italian girl, Miss Lucia; was not he, the little angel? Ah! now don't look like that, deary; he's a singing beautiful now, in a prettier church than St. Mary's, and we shall hear him again after a bit."

Lady Adelaide and Lucia were not the only visitors in Hamilton-street that morning. Mrs. St. Aubyn called on her way to St. Joseph's House with a message to Algernon, who was to be sure to bring plenty of music for the evening's amusement. She pressed May to return home with her. Nor were Lady Adelaide and Lucia less earnest in their entreaties to be allowed to carry her away; but in vain. She preferred remaining in Hamilton-street for the present—assuring them, with one of her old bright smiles, that it would do her more good than they could believe to be left alone for the next few weeks; though by-and-by their invitations would be only too gladly accepted when she had learnt her lesson—more perfectly learnt, as best she might, learn to live without Algie.

CHAPTER XXII.

“ Love on earth that grieveth,
Tears of pain and shame—
God in heaven receiveth,
Covering it from blame—
With the enfolding mantle
Of th’ Almighty’s name.”

“ A LETTER from abroad and sixpence to pay for over-weight.”

“ There it is then, and twice as much again if wanted, and from my own pocket, too ! ” exclaimed Phœbe, receiving with none of her usual nonchalance, when answering his or any one else’s single knock, the postman’s budget. “ A letter from Miss Rachel, bless her ! and a good long one into the bargain, to judge from the weight and my sixpence. The best I ever spent if it do but bring back a smile to that sweet face up there. She’s been expecting a letter this last three weeks back, I’ll be bound, especially sin the last mail comed in, only she never don’t make no fuss or botheration about things as a many do as ain’t got half the excuse for their fidgeting as Miss May has, poor darling ! ” and Phœbe was right. May had not only for some weeks past been in daily expectation of a letter from Rachel, but was beginning to feel a little anxious at her sister’s prolonged silence. Not that May was by any means an inhabitant of a certain country referred to the other day in some publication as “ Mope-dom ; ” or inclined to the (in this world) extremely unnecessary trouble of “ mounting donkeys ” to meet sorrow.

The last accounts of Rachel’s health had been so favour-

able as to leave no real excuse for anxiety on that score ; and as to other excuses for Rachel's sins of omission in the way of letter-writing, they were, as usual, when the said spoiled sister was in question—innumerable. Either she was busy sight-seeing with Augusta, or the last-named young lady left little time unoccupied at Rachel's command ; or they had gone on some new expedition, and she was waiting till their plans were more settled ; or the letter (not an unusual occurrence with foreign ones) had been mislaid ; or, in fact any and everything rather than allow the possibility of Rachel's being personally to blame. And yet in spite of all this philosophy and excuse-making, an indefinable yearning for a sight of her little sister's handwriting would at times creep over May ; and never had old Phœbe's voice or footstep been more welcome than when, on the morning in question, holding Rachel's precious document triumphantly on high, she entered the breakfast-room.

Rachel's letter was dated in Easter week, therefore, must have been, according to May's fourth supposition, delayed on the way. The news of Algie's death had not, of course, reached Malta when it was written ; her first message almost was to him, added to many a minute inquiry after the child's health, voice, and singing capabilities at St. Mary's. Rachel then passed on to give an account of all Augusta's and her own doings in Malta during Lent and Holy Week, but their sudden and wholly unlooked-for meeting with Frank Egerton was at first passed over hurriedly—just mentioned and then dismissed—Frank Egerton *en route* for England ; the reader started and turned pale, but went on reading. Rachel's next paragraph pictured the cave and catacombs at Città Vecchia, mixed up with a variety of trivial and amusing incidents connected with Augusta and Mrs. Cunningham's eccentricities nervously rather than graphically described, as though the writer, half in haste to

proceed and yet half glad of any excuse for delay, were but playing with pen and ink in the interim and shaping her ideas gradually into form. At length came Easter Day—every service lingered over and spun out as though, instead of a twenty-one years' Catholic, May were a catechumen needing instruction on these points. How very odd of Rachel, thought her sister—something must surely lay at the bottom of all this lingering and abstraction—so unlike Rachel's letters in general. Easter Even came in due time, the evening we left herself and Mr. Egerton on Valetta's sunlit shores—the evening too, little Algernon quitted England's for home and Patria.

"I have already told you, May," continued the writer (the point in question had not been as yet even alluded to), "how unaccountable Mr. Egerton has altogether appeared to me since our meeting in this country. To tell you the plain truth, his change of manner was so painfully marked as to determine me at last on asking boldly if anything were the matter; if either you or myself had said anything in our letters to cause this change; or whether it was owing to my negligence in the letter-writing way the last few months. You know I have been sadly idle, and was quite prepared to make an open confession of my naughtiness. I always like these little explanations or 'make ups,' as we used to call them at Haseldyne, especially with old friends of our dear, dear mother's as [here some word was scratched over and Mr. Egerton substituted] such Mr. Egerton may justly be called. My nice little ambush, however, threatened to end in disappointment, for, contrive as I might, never was an opportunity of speaking alone with Mr. Egerton to be obtained: either Augusta claimed his chaperonage, or Mrs. Cunningham his attentions, or business had to be attended to in the town, and he was obliged just as we happened to find ourselves *tête-à-tête* to bid a tiresome farewell; or a

thousand other difficulties intervened—till on the evening of Easter Day.” (Ah! Rachel, why refer in such torturing frequency to that evening!) The lonely sister paused in the perusal, and with closed eyes. “On that evening,” continued the unconscious tormentor, “Augusta and Mr. Cunningham proposing a long walk—far too long a one for my walking possibilities—left Mr. Egerton and myself on the beach, promising to call for us on their return. A first-rate arrangement, thought little I, and so, as you will hear by-and-by, did some one else consider it. There are such pretty walks out there—on the south coast of Valetta; the absence of verdure being the grand drawback, in general, to anything like fine scenery in this island. On the coast, however, tree and shrub, fern and flower, are often to be seen springing curiously from the picturesque rocks in the background, while the pretty fair-looking town, and brilliant Mediterranean on either side supply many another deficiency. Well, to proceed with my story,—we walked up and down for some considerable time—we two silly things—without speaking—both waiting for the other to begin the conversation—till the sun began to set; glancing on the white sails of the distant ships, many of them bound for England—and this made me think of you, darling, and Algie, and wonder how you were spending Easter Sunday in England.” May tried to smile this time, her higher will struggling for mastery with the selfish yearning love, recalling, passionately, that small absent vision, with its eye of light and voice of melody, back to her side—to toil—to suffer—to be tempted—perchance to fall for ever. “Well, May, somehow or other—you know I am terribly silly, and the least thing makes me cry like a baby,” scribbled on Rachel, “the sight of the ships, and the thought of you and Algie—all by yourselves in England on Easter Day—no mamma, no Arthur, no anybody with you—overcame me altogether. It

seemed as if this life of ours was too much—too sadly much like those shadowy far-away ships, vanishing so swiftly out of sight ; and for a moment I fancied you and Algie were in them waving your hands to us on the shore, and your favourite lines came into my mind ;—

“ ‘ They that have loved an exile must not mourn,
To see him parting from his native bourne
O’er the dark sea.’

And I called out loudly, indeed I could scarcely help it, for you to come and take me with you ‘ o’er the dark sea.’ All the miserable loneliness, the desolation, of last year appeared to have come back again ; and then May, then Mr. Egerton took my hand, and tears—fancy tears, real large ones in his merry eyes—were actually standing there. I never saw him look so grave or so hand—— I mean so unhappy before. He is so improved, May, you cannot think ; we used at one time, you remember, to consider him a trifle too boyish and off-hand, but that is all passed away now. Even *you* would think him grave enough since he went abroad ; and Augusta, who, in these matters is a pretty fair judge, calls him so extremely clever ; and, oh ! May, better, far better than all, he is a downright earnest Catholic ; there, I do believe, lies the chief reason of his improvement I am telling you about. And now, May, you must guess a secret ; you always used to guess my little secrets at Haseldyne, and must not be stupid now. There, I see you smile : clever May, you have done it already. Yes, you are quite right, strange as it may sound, and it really does sound very strange, for I feel more like a silly giddy child than a woman old enough to be ——.” Did May’s eyes deceive her or had little Rachel’s mind become, indeed, as once, alas ! it had threatened to become, dimmed and overclouded ?—those last words—the context was again re-read. Nothing could

be plainer, clearer than their meaning : " I feel more like a giddy child, than a woman old enough to be married."

" Married ! " exclaimed May aloud, " and to Frank Egerton ; why, either he or the poor child herself must be demented ;" and, partly from nervous excitement, partly from a passing emotion of uncontrollable amusement, she laughed out loud.

Phœbe, sweeping in the adjoining room, caught the laugh and chuckled with delight ; " There now," addressing her broom, which having been safe upstairs in Phœbe's closet when the postman called, was in happy ignorance on the subject, " didn't I tell you that sixpence of mine wore the best I ever had the luck to spend ; don't it do my heart good to hear her laugh again at Miss Rachel's funny sayings. She always wore for making her sister laugh, wore Miss Rachel, a pretty dear ; don't she love her above a bit that's all, and as to Miss May, why, from the time them two was bits o' things together in the nursery, at Haseldyne, she'd never deny her nothing, bless you, not from the very toys, Miss Rachel used to cry after when she'd broken her own, as mostly wore the case afore they was a day old—a little giddy mite of a baby, as she always wore. How I wish she'd come back to England, or Miss May go out to her. They had not ought to be separated no longer, now he's gone from us—a little angel. Phœbe listened for another laugh, but in vain. The look of astonished perplexity written on her young mistress's face, had Phœbe peeped into the room, might have altered her opinion as to Miss Rachel's " funny sayings," being, under present circumstances, any real cause for amusement.

" What can he be about ? " marvelled the thunder-struck sister, reading on ; " Rachel's words are clear enough ; but what of *him*, what mystery, for mystery there must be, lies concealed beneath this unheard-of news ; what can he be

about ? and why did I allow the child to leave England without me ? and yet to avoid it was impossible.”——“I hope you do not think me too impulsive, darling ; or conclude I have acted hastily in this matter ; but it is so pleasant, so very pleasant to be loved, to be cared for, beyond anybody else in the wide world, by so good, so clever—oh, May, so noble a man, as Mr. Egerton, especially after one has been so miserable—I mean since mamma died, and we have been left alone in the world—no one much caring what became of us ; and besides this, he has suffered so terribly on my account, poor fellow. I had better tell you all about it. Mr. Egerton—suppose I call him Frank at once, as it pleases him—has given me full permission—looking upon you now, as he says, in the light of my mother, no less than *my*, I mean *our* own darling beautiful sister—Well, Frank, then, has cared for me, beyond the rest of the world, ever since that day, that dreadful day, Adelaide was married ; when I fainted away, you know, and Mr.—Frank, I mean, carried me back to the carriage—he says (I should not like to write all this nonsense to any one else, but you, May) not even Arthur or Algie, only he, dear precious little dot, would not understand it ; Frank says, that ever since that day, it has been love, before it was only admiration. In fact, don’t be angry at his impertinence, May, because he doesn’t mean it for impertinence, only he has a funny way of saying things, he scarcely knew, at first, which to like the best, you or myself ;”—something very like another laugh here greeted Phœbe’s attentive ears ;”—only, May, he was always afraid of you and your gravity, and besides he fancied—but never mind what he fancied ; it does not signify, only it explains things to me a good deal—he fancied some one else—but never mind, May, dear, he is very impertinent fancying things about other people, and life is very strange.” In her sister’s last little truism, May never before felt so much dis-

posed to acquiesce. As to Mr. Egerton's condemnation, her judgment must remain suspended till the conclusion of Rachel's letter; "he did not think it right," continued the betrothed, "to make any proposal before leaving England; his future prospects being uncertain, the moment, however, a tolerably fair hope arose of his returning home, in the course of a few years, he wrote to me; and oh, May, here come the strangest, though not for either of us, perhaps, *saddest*, part of the story, because at that time I did not know him so well, nor did I dream of marrying, and should then, I feel quite positive, have said *no*; so as things turn out, it was just as well, perhaps, Frank's letter did *not* reach me, though for *him*, poor fellow, it has been in the meantime terrible work, waiting and waiting month after month, and enduring that horrible suspense which I well know, I mean—*every* one well knows—is worse, than any other possible suffering; one can make up one's mind to sorrows and disappointments, when they really arrive, but that fearing and hoping—hoping and fearing, as poor Frank has been doing the last three quarters of a year, is worse than anything, is it not? My silence also—how wrong of me yielding to that stupid idleness—induced him to imagine I was offended, which, as I tell Frank, was worse than an absurdity, for no one need be offended, I should think, at being the object of affection; however little they may unhappily be able to reciprocate the attachment."

May laid her sister's letter down at this point, and gently, very gently—for some people when suffering from over-excitement, become ghost-like in their movements—opened her writing-desk. There, among a packet of other foreign epistles, written either by Arthur, Adelaide, or Mr. Egerton himself, lay the well-remembered one, of that last year's summer afternoon. Had May ever regretted, or in wish recalled her (I think we decided at the time mistaken,

if not precipitate) reply ? Without a moment's hesitation we can answer the question, with a decided "never." For intention, pure, lofty, prayer-sustained, can even, though apparently misled, afford to endure calmly, nay, cheerfully, the else torturing stings of conscience. The restless tide of result, we poor strutters on life's sand-erected stage lack the power, even had we the wisdom to control. The actors from impulse alone ; for impulse, whether love-directed, or otherwise, claims not, unsupported by principle, the right of action, may fear the hereafter's self-reproach. Never, therefore, we may safely determine, except in hours of sore temptation, —and temptation disregarded, leaving no trace behind, remains but temptation still—had May's decision approached even the confines of regret. To God had her motive been offered up in lowliest sacrifice ; to Him the result, either for Rachel, or herself. Yes, Rachel, too, now—no less than herself—for that last point had to be yielded, ere the resignation was complete. Drawing Mr. Egerton's letter from, however, its ten months' retirement, May once more glanced, or rather meditated, over the contents ; and then returning to her desk, sought eagerly, eagerly enough even to have satisfied Rachel, for the envelope. Let those whose earthly destiny has never, in the smooth current of daily life, down which some are permitted to glide, leant on threads as slender, call our tale an unreality, denying, if they will, the possibility of an over-true story being ever founded on fact ; but the envelope was nowhere to be found. Phœbe's dustpan would have given, if asked, more definite information on the little scrap of paper's disappearance, than ever the seeker was otherwise likely to arrive at. An indefinite remembrance of having on that weary day—a while ago—torn into shreds, both the envelope containing St. Clair's, as well as Mr. Egerton's letter ; mingled with a wild idea of calling Phœbe to ascertain, whether she—

always careful old woman, remembered one day last summer sweeping the said fragments from the room, floated through our heroine's mind—allowedly mystified by the events of the morning—till, smiling at her childishness, Mr. Egerton's letter was again resumed. Was any envelope needed? Lay not the mystery unfolded before her? The letter might equally well have been written to herself or Rachel, "Miss Templeton," and "your sister," being the terms used throughout.]

"How stupid not to have guessed this before," said the smile of something like happiness with which, spite of an approaching headache, Rachel's simple account of Frank Egerton's newly-discovered attachment was now reviewed. And yet how strange, how marvellously strange—setting aside her own part in the drama—did their engagement appear: not Frank Egerton's love for her beautiful little sister—that was natural enough—Rachel was the girl, of all others, to attract his open-hearted, ingenuous nature, but Rachel's for *him*—there lay the mystery. Was it possible, then, to love *twice*, and so soon again? To marry from a sense of duty, if Heaven so willed the sacrifice—to be obedient, grateful, affectionate, promoting, in every way woman could devise, the happiness of the thus-selected husband, though, in Rachel's case, a perilous experiment, May could comprehend. But her sister spoke of *love*, and Rachel's words, though simple, were from that very simplicity all the more real. Duty had no share in the selection, unless her heart had been purposely hidden beneath the veil of a professed attachment, and that, as just observed, was still less probable. Had the girl's love for another then been a *dream*—a mere illusion of the imagination? But if so, wherefore all that agony—that long-hidden, weary sorrow? May, with all her penetration—to say nothing of her faith in Rachel's perfections, solved not the difficulty. That faith itself, in truth, was the impediment, Rachel's weaker

points of character being hidden from one only bent on contemplating its attractions. To mere lookers-on, the mystery is more easily explained. Rachel Templeton was, like many another of her disposition, capable, to any amount, however heroic, of returning affection; but either on man, woman, or child, to bestow it for any length of time unreciprocated, was a feat beyond her—all wise people, be it remembered, bearing her out in the argument of being, on this head, perfectly in the right. Her adoration for St. Clair having been formed principally, if not altogether, on an indefinite, though pardonable, supposition of the young nobleman's preference for herself. Lord St. Clair's departure from England without even bidding her a last farewell, save in a letter to her sister, had opened Rachel's eyes to a humiliating mistake. The discovery had shaken, but had failed to shatter, the heart of sixteen. Few human beings, save in the case of mothers, who, as regards their children, are an exception to every rule, few human beings are, we believe, by nature (we speak not now of grace) capable of a wholly disinterested attachment—a broad assertion, but borne out, if not by common sense, at least by everyday facts—and "facts" are, as the old Scotch saying has it, "chields that wunna ding."

The few gifted ones, and they are greatly to be commiserated, able to love for love's own dear sake, spite of coldness, indifference, changeableness, nay, even contempt itself; ready to endure all things sooner than forsake their first glad heart's allegiance—it matters not on whom bestowed—whether on friend or lover, man or woman, friendship with some natures being equally with a feeling more impassioned, *idolatry*, had better, for two cogent reasons, quit society *in toto*: *primâ facie*, because society will either laugh at or be scandalized by their folly; secondly, because a love so rare, and therefore heaven-like,

was never intended for society's companionship, and had far better be banished where her rules are never mentioned and all true love more than requited.

No blame to little Rachel that among these few we cannot number her. It is no small accomplishment in this world even to *return* love *well*, and this did our golden-haired beauty to perfection: ever gentle, unexact, self-forgetful was Rachel in her affections; and happy the man who would call her wife, the friend who could boast her friendship. While others change not, they will find her true—*vice versa*. But who has any right to complain? *Quid pro quo* being surely all the world over fair play.

The effects Mr. Egerton's "impertinent fancies" may have produced on Rachel's mind we are not at liberty to dive into. They did their work, let that suffice. And having now said all we can in extenuation of a heart caught in the rebound, we will bring the captive's confession and letter to a conclusion, not forgetting the postscript—carrying all sorts of loving messages from brother-elect to sister; although the former hoping soon to be in England, and able to urge in person a request May must not, at the risk of breaking both his and Rachel's hearts, refuse to comply with—neither of the lovers choosing to commit to paper a petition upon which so much of joy or sorrow depended. May smiled, the clue once given, her Haseldyne quickness at guessing secrets reassumed its power. The request was at once anticipated, and why not complied with, if God would permit? Long engagements, under any circumstances, were odious—under Rachel's and Frank Egerton's still more unadvisable. Happiness deferred, like hope in a similar predicament, was sickening work. Why should their marriage not take place ere Frank's return to Australia; and herself, why not accompany her darling Rachel thither. Nothing now remained in England to live

for, and their little incomes united, there would be no imprudence in beginning housekeeping. Australia, too, was a rising country ; one in which talent might meet with something better than a passing renown. And then, oh, blessed possibility ! her exertions might be the means, not only of helping on Rachel's happiness, but hither—hither once more dreams of her youth—of aiding Arthur to return, seeing his sacrifice rewarded, his early vocation fulfilled her noble, her saintly—yes, she dared to call him so—her saintly brother embrace, and that ere youth had departed, the life long ago chosen by the light yet earnest-hearted boy as the summit of earthly bliss.

This, however, was but a dream of the far-off future ; and May had learnt at one-and-twenty a lesson many another double that number of years in advance has not yet fully committed to memory. She had learnt—

“ To trust no future, however pleasant,
To let the dead past bury its dead—
To act—act in the living present,
Heart within, and God o'erhead.”

And the present at that moment suggested the wisdom—apart from the necessity—of awaiting, patiently, her elect brother-in-law's coming visit. His own and Rachel's plans, wishes, and intentions would then unfold themselves ; her's being shaped according to circumstances. And with this determination each word of tender congratulation to Rachel, of affectionate regard to Mr. Egerton, was penned by the writer. Phoebe, for the present, being her young mistresses one and only confidant as regarded Rachel's engagement ; and well, it must be confessed, did the faithful old nurse merit the confidantship, there being two or three women in the world able, without the aid of miraculous intervention, to keep a secret, and Phoebe being one of the number.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ Fair morrow, ladye, I
Bring ye good tidings.”

“ So Arthur is coming home, May ; what capital news ! ” exclaimed a well-known voice, as, entering May’s room a few days subsequent to the receipt of Rachel’s letter, the speaker’s hand was laid on her shoulder.

“ Arthur coming home, Adelaide. Why you must be dreaming. Such news must have come either from fancy, or your own dear little brain-land. Are you still asleep, or shall I pour out a cup of tea for your only half-awake ladyship ? ”

“ As many as you will, for I am desperately thirsty, and my walk before breakfast-time not altogether suited to my delicate constitution. I could no longer, however, delay coming to offer my congratulations on this glorious news, reaching me in a scrap of paper from St. Clair last evening, and confirmed by this morning’s *Times*. What a stupid girl not to have become *au fait* to the news of the world before nine A.M. on a fine summer’s morning. Why you are scarcely worthy of your country.”

“ Ah, Adelaide ! ” and May springing up knelt down eagerly by the other’s side, “ tell me what you mean at once. Can it be possible ? I dare not—no, I dare not believe in such happiness.”

“ You may do so, nevertheless, most faithfully ; and having an intense dislike to be disbelieved even by my friends, the people by-the-bye always most incredulous, I will make my words more emphatic, and then discredit

them again at your peril. Once to make ready ; twice to prepare ; three times, and away, as Lucia says, ere she leaves me every morning for school. *Arthur Templeton is coming home*, and that in the course of the next three months, or four at most, in company with young Captain Godwin, the boy-officer, who distinguished himself so gallantly at the battle of Sobraon, and gained speedy promotion for his trouble—promotion, from St. Clair's account (whose frequent correspondence with Arthur keeps me, you must know, in a perpetual state of jealousy), the youthful captain seems not greatly to appreciate, he being about—now this Indian uproar has happily concluded—to quit the army altogether. Arthur's letter, however, will tell you all about it ; and now if you consider my news worth hearing, and my behaviour in trudging over here to communicate it remarkable—your eyes and cheeks both answering in the affirmative—all I can say is, you know how to make me the best amends, so don't pretend to be ignorant—like a wilful May as you have lately been."

"You mean, to return home with you for a week or two. Well really, dear Addy, I think I must. My own Arthur—and so soon, too. How kind and good of you. And that boy, too. I can guess now how it is ; dearest Arthur, you are, indeed, doubly rewarded. Who would have thought this that dreary night we parted at Haseldyne?"

"My ways are not your ways." "No, my God, they are not indeed. If we could—oh, if we could but put a little more trust in those loving words," half aloud, half to herself, thus soliloquized the now happy, thrice happy May ; and Adelaide was satisfied. It is a blessed thing to bear tidings of joy even to the already light-hearted ones of the earth. We were made for joy each one of us—created to rejoice, though, for a while, the end of our creation tarries ; but to raise the crushed spirit, to reanimate the broken-

hearted—that were an angel's mission; and to Lady Adelaide had fallen the privilege this morning. May's look and smile, as well as promise of accompanying her home, were Adelaide's reward. Yes, reward; for Adelaide not only loved May as few things were loved by the exclusive Lady Mansfield, but had learnt also, since the day sorrow first fell on her own heart, to enter more earnestly than of old into the woes of others. Her friend's rejection of her brother was unknown to Adelaide, unknown at least so far as actual information from either party concerned might conduce to ignorance. There is, however, a knowledge instinctively acquired by word and tone, look and letter, St. Clair's sister, and May Templeton's bosom friend (if the term be truthfully applied to one whose bosom secrets seldom travelled from home) had become silently, though painfully, alive to. Increased tenderness towards May had, so far as external demonstration went, been the result of Lady Adelaide's well-founded suspicions. That May could have acted, even in rejecting her idolized St. Clair, from any motive short of some high, though probably mistaken, intention, never crossed the mind of one accustomed to reverence, almost extravagantly, the very virtues lacking in her own character.

Since little Algernon's death especially, Adelaide's affection for the lonely, though tearless, sister left behind had redoubled. Never had a day passed by and her footstep been absent from Hamilton Street. Invitation after invitation, backed by Lucia's kisses and entreaties, had been heaped on the sorrow-stricken sister; but, till this morning, always in vain. May could not, unless the necessity became actually apparent, tear herself even for a day or two from those dear, well-trodden haunts. "By-and-bye, by-and-bye," was the reply to every invitation; but at present, in very pity, let her linger there with Phœbe. Let her attend the church

within whose walls *he* used to sing. Let her fancy—nay, sometimes feel quite sure—she heard his voice in the choir, only far away in the distance, except at intervals, when one or two clear ringing notes seemed very near. It was the merest fancy, of course—yet let her fancy on ; and oh ! ye heart-broken mothers, or loving sisters, in hours of lonely desolation, when, after laying your little ones in their last resting-places, you have returned home to miss, with bleeding heart, the tiny step on the staircase, the silver laughter in the nursery, the pure soft kiss from the rosebud lip at bedtime—when your eye falls so often on the pretty toys no one plays with now, the picture book on the table, little hands, now crumbling into dust, were once well used to sprawl over ; or even the trumpet and whistle, whose sound you were apt at times to dread—ah ! what now would you give to hear it once again ?—the straw cap hanging in the hall, when the curly head it once graced and sheltered is lying low beneath the soil, never again to rise, till “ this mortal shall have been clothed with immortality, this corruptible with incorruption,”—then, lonely and sorrowing ones, may you oftentimes be cheered by fancies such as haunted Algie’s sister. May you also be forgiven if even foolish enough to declare them something more than fancies—dreams, tinged with a deeper reality ; for—

“ Who knows how near each holy hour,
The pure and child-like dead ;
May linger where in shrine or bower,
The mourner’s prayer is said.”

The time, however, had now arrived for Adelaide’s invitation to be accepted with something approaching pleasure. Reaction—here our truest name perhaps for happiness—was at work now, as once more renewing her promise of accompanying Lady Adelaide to Hyde Park Terrace, May,

observing "better late than never," began her usual string of affectionate inquiries after Lucia, and somewhat more coldly polite ones respecting Sir Allen Mansfield.

"Lucia was quite well, very happy, and a greater comfort than was possible to express," sighed Lady Adelaide; "but of her husband's movements she could give little, if any, account. They scarcely ever met."

Few were the ears to whom, by the proud Lady Adelaide, even this much would have been acknowledged. May's, however, were the one grand exception, "and she must not think," continued Adelaide, nervously, "that Sir Allen's absence from home was owing to any lack of endeavour on Lucia's side, or her own, to make it a bright one. Since their return to England, no stone had been left unturned to beguile him thither, but in vain. It was her own fault for having married so thoughtlessly—no, not thoughtlessly, worse than that—without one grain of principle in her selection of a husband. She had no one else to blame for the result, and yet—for that very reason, perhaps—it seemed, at times, beyond the power of endurance. Her penance—of course it could not really be so—but it seemed *too* heavy. If she were but brave, like May—if she could but accept a now inevitable destiny, with the same amount of courage and sweetness! Whence came that power of quiet endurance in one whose sorrow had, in many respects, a thousand times exceeded her own?"

"Dearest Adelaide," was the meekly winning answer, as May, throwing aside her accustomed reserve in these matters, again knelt down beside her; "I know you are unhappy, and no one, but my own heart, can tell what I would not give to help to comfort you. If I might, without being thought intrusive, speak to you for a moment as to one of my little school children, may I, Adelaide?"

A tearful kiss on the pale earnest face, upraised to her own, gave more than permission.

"Well, then, dearest Addie, if so unhappy, so miserable, why stay away from what alone can confer peace? To speak very plainly, dearest, why any longer be a merely nominal Catholic? You have, from intellectual conviction, embraced the true faith; but that is not enough. Its chiefest privilege, its surest repose, is scarcely yet your own. If restless, peaceless, undone on earth, why absent so often from the fount of peace—of rest's very self?"

"Because too utterly unworthy, except when commanded to approach," was the saddened, broken answer.

"Nay, Adelaide, the very reason of all others for drawing nigh. Did she who, to be deluged with His blood, knelt beneath the pierced feet on Calvary, choose that station because *merited* by her own worthiness, or from another and widely opposite consideration, think you? Ah, Adelaide, dearest sister, unlearn the past, and be a little child once more. Come to Him, and come to Him often—too often you can scarcely come. Are you weary? He will give you rest.—Are you disappointed? Every longing will He more than supply.—Are you sick, weary of the world and its hollow deception? Glimpses shall there be given you of that world into which nothing which defileth can enter.—Are you tortured by your husband's neglect and want of affection? He who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, will there espouse you unto Himself. Already has He encircled your soul with the mystic ring of His betrothed, the ring wherewith He weds to Himself the souls of His beloved—the ring of suffering. He longs, nay, is now even yearning, for your presence at His earthly altars—the vestibules of His marriage feast in heaven. Do not disappoint that patient longing."

Both ladies were silent for some moments, and the pencil

of a Raffaele might not unaptly have been employed in picturing the scene. There sat the once haughty Lady Adelaide, richly attired, according to her station, her head resting on her arm, and fingers glittering with jewellery; while at her feet, dressed in deep mourning, knelt May—the latter's slight girlish figure bent forward, and the face, over which sorrow's chisel had passed only to mould the expression into more saint-like loveliness, looking up beseechingly into Lady Adelaide's, her small white hands clasped in prayer. Not then, but hereafter, perchance, will she learn that prayer was answered. That another jewel, wherewith to enrich the diadem, once wreathed with thorns, for her sake, had been granted to her appeal. By some strange electricity of thought, May's face at that moment recalled to Adelaide's mind the view long ago beheld on the hill of Fièsole, and the aged monk's emphatic words, bidding his then unwilling listener lay the shattered fragments of a wasted lifetime where alone they might be reunited. Nor was the scroll beneath Lucia's crucifix, with its " *Ici j'ai trouvé le repos* " forgotten in that moment.

After a while she said in a tone of deep feeling, passing her hand caressingly over the kneeler's braided hair: "May, you are right; you have spoken the truth. I will try to obey."

"Nay, nay, Adelaide, not obey." — "Well then follow your advice, and—yes—you need not try to stop my mouth, for I mean to have my say out;" but at this moment Phœbe entered, with a sort of fussy importance, peculiar to her when in the presence of either Lord St. Clair or Lady Adelaide, to inform the latter that a messenger from Haseldyne wished to speak with her. The man had been to Hyde Park Terrace, and not finding her ladyship at home, had, without delay, proceeded to Westminster. His message, when delivered, was of no agreeable nature. The

Earl was seriously ill, having been seized with paralysis the preceding evening. His request for his daughter to come to him immediately was an urgent one, seconded by the physician in attendance.

To Adelaide more than to any of his other children, St. Clair excepted, had the earl felt more true affection than, partly from fear of exciting the countess's displeasure, partly from a reserve dictated by deeply ingrained selfishness, he had cared in times of health and prosperity to demonstrate. A sick-bed, however, whether in the palace or the cottage, is, if any thing down here ever is to be so, a marvellous reformer. Neglected responsibilities, repulsed affection, with a host of other equally remorseful memories, rise up in no faintly-defined outline before us then. Nor was the Earl of Morley, with his riches and his self-love, his freedom from this world's anxieties, and presence of all the accidental comforts supposed to render a sick-bed more endurable, permitted to lie there unawakened by the reminiscences of the past. An indefinite acknowledgment of not having acted a true father's part towards his first wife's children, Lady Adelaide more especially, had, perhaps, more than any other sentiment, dictated his desire of having her by his side in the hour of sickness. No one durst whisper to him of danger, and Adelaide, with the ready forgetfulness of past injury under present suffering—always more or less an ingredient in woman's nature—had no sooner become aware of her father's illness, than the yearning to be with him—nursing—soothing—doing all in her power to alleviate that old man's distress,—predominated over every other feeling. But what of Lucia? The child could not well accompany her to Haseldyne, where the earl's sickness monopolizing her entire attention, she would be exposed to trials and influences in her father's home, the indulgent mother little coveted for her darling.

May, however, soon came to Adelaide's aid under this dilemma.

"Lucia could remain with her till Adelaide's return, and thus, in a great measure supply," said Miss Templeton, turning a winning smile on her friend, "for her own disappointment in not being able at present to fulfil their new-made engagement."

The offer was gratefully accepted. Lucia should be sent to Hamilton Street that afternoon, after seeing Lady Adelaide off by the train to Haseldyne; and with a fervent embrace, the friends separated, to meet ere long again, but under far different circumstances. May spent the rest of the morning with Mrs. St. Aubyn, with whom, twice or thrice a week, she was in the habit of visiting their parish workhouse. Our heroine's love and admiration for the crotchety lady of ball-room animadversion kept measure with their increasing intimacy. Mrs. St. Aubyn appearing to May so completely one of those who, living in the world, are yet kept from its evil, whether in her own home, in the whirlpool of society, or when visiting the poor and desolate. St. Clair's lady-rival was ever the same; ever ready to sympathize, so far as might consistently be, with the one, to compassionate the other; seldom uncheerful, never unrecollected. The sight of her calm, placid face was to May refreshing as a glimpse of violets wafted past her on some dusty day in the crowded streets around.

They wended their way to the workhouse together, did the two friends, and ere they quitted its dreary-looking walls, uncheered by print or picture, or, what in this country is still more carefully put out of sight, the symbol of man's redemption, pointing onward to a more gladsome home than a workhouse-ward can present, many a sad heart there felt lightened,—many a sinful one encouraged to amend.

Why are there not more—many more Mrs. St. Aubyns before our eyes on the great theatre of London life? Why are there not others, who, like herself, high-born and noble, will yet venture a step behind its dazzling panorama, and learn for themselves some little portion of the stern and terrible realities too carefully hidden from view amid the din and glitter of fashionable society? Is that society then so completely satisfying—so altogether peaceful, that none, even for their own sakes, will step aside betimes for an hour or two, and taste the sweetness of cheering one weary heart—of soothing one dying pillow; the blessedness of aiding one straying footstep to reach the land from which it will never again be tempted to wander. Money alone will not accomplish this! Loving hearts and hands, personal strength and personal influence are needed. The nun and the monk, bound in self-forgetful sacrifice to the altar, are already in the field, but other labourers are wanted. We cannot all be religious, but we can all be workers, each one in his or her vocation; and let no secular, however fettered by the rules and usages of this world's requirements, and rarely are these disregarded, pronounce personal exertion among the poor an impossibility, till the trial has been made, and made earnestly, and failed in its accomplishment. There is a volume reminding us of One who, adored by countless hosts of angels, once knelt down to wash the feet of sinners—One who scorned to work by proxy; and shall we then be so ready?

On reaching home, after bidding farewell to Mrs. St. Aubyn, May found Lucia in the drawing-room, expecting her arrival. Bitter was the poor child's distress at being separated, even for a week or two, from her beloved Lady Adelaide.

The evening was spent in tolerably successful efforts on May's part to amuse her guest, and on the latter's to appear

amused; and it was not till Lucia slept soundly that May found leisure to sit down quietly and review the news of the morning.

So Arthur was coming home, and coming soon. His return, nay, the probable reason of that return, was no longer a dream of the future. Charley Godwin's entreaties—entreaties simply hinted at in a former letter from India, had, it might be, prevailed; or, if not, they would both, she and Arthur, work hard together, till the hope of his boyhood was at length fulfilled. The past dreary separation would but enhance the coming joy. For the present they must live together—she his housekeeper, he, father, mother, sister and brother, linked in one holy blessed relationship. His vocation fulfilled, Rachel's married home should claim her presence, but not till then. The little sister had gained an abler protector than sister's love could afford. She could wait now.

May sat opposite a daguerreotyped likeness of her exiled brother, a smile of happiness on her face, absolutely arranging the very minutiae of their future life, till the churches around struck the hour of midnight, reminding her that Ascension Day had commenced—the day on which the exiled Saviour, "The King of kings and Lord of lords," through the uplifted gates and the everlasting doors, re-entered *His* native land, while ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands sung his welcome home. And after praying that both she and her absent ones might, in heart and mind, thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell, May sank to sleep, wondering what anthem was chanted up there on Ascension Day, and whether her little Algie had already learnt it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“ Oh, ye beloved—come home,
Our life is dim where ye are not,
Back ye beloved ! Come home ! ”

MRS. HEMANS.

FRANK EGERTON arrived in England, nor had Rachel's account of her betrothed's improvement, either in manners and appearance been, by any means, so thought May at least, exaggerated.

Miss Templeton's meeting with her old friend was warm and affectionate as of old. They had a thousand themes to discourse upon ; Rachel, however, either by the merest chance, or some involuntary contrivance of Mr. Egerton's, always forming the centre of every conversation. The lovers' secret—the request, by refusing which May was to incur the awful penalty of breaking two youthful hearts, one of the said troublesome appendages being the property of a favourite sister,—had been happily guessed at by the not over and above maternal-looking individual whom Mr. Egerton, with all the grave earnestness of a man deeply in love, addressed as Rachel's mother and protectress. He was returning to Australia with all despatch—could not, in all human probability, set foot in England again for years to come—had enough, with economy and prudence, to support a wife in the colony. *Must* they wait those long weary years ? Were riches *indispensable* to happiness ?—to Rachel's happiness he meant. *She* said not, sweet child ; but what had May to urge on that point. The physicians had ordered his little Rachel to remain abroad, if possible, some one or two years to come, her tendency to consumption being, in all likelihood, thus averted. If this were

indeed the case, who would watch over and care for Rachel's health and happiness with equal tenderness as her husband's.

May smiled, and shook her finger archly towards him, and then pointed it towards herself.

"Ah! he did not mean to say *that*—not even a husband could care more for his Rachel than her sister had done—God bless her for it! but—but— he had another request to make. Why would not May accompany them abroad? That would complete their happiness;—and, but ah! he had forgotten Arthur's expected return. She must, of course, for the present, remain with him. How stupid not to remember that."

"No, not stupid;" rejoined May, with an impertinent expression of face, which even *her* features could assume at times; "only a little and very excusable want of recollection. Arthur's return home was not, to be sure, an event to be easily forgotten; but then people, under certain circumstances of life, must not be dealt hardly with."

"Arthur, however," persisted Mr. Egerton, laughing, "would not, for ever and a day, require her sisterly attentions. He would either follow his, Frank Egerton's, example, and take unto himself a fair wife, who, after the fashion of fair wives in general, would quickly put her still fairer sister-in-law's nose out of joint [here May indulged in a short, happy laugh], or he would (which, according to Rachel's account, was more in his line) become a priest—nay, perchance a shaven monk."

"In which event," chimed in joyously the future monk's sister, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Egerton, of Expectation Villa, Bliss Terrace, Adelaide, Australia, might spend their leisure hours in looking out for the arrival of a steam-packet from England, containing a certain destitute, forsaken, friendless young female, commonly distinguished by the name of May

Templeton, soon to throw herself upon their charitable protection."

"It was all settled then," urged the delighted Frank, proving how admirably well the art of spelling the word "opportunity" had been acquired during his Australian novitiate, by producing, at this point of their discourse, a letter from Augusta, enclosing another very elegant and geranium-scented *billet-doux*, directed to Miss Templeton, in the handwriting of no less a personage than her former pupil, Mrs. Cunningham, in which epistle the last-named lady besought her "dearest Miss Templeton" to afford her the unutterable felicity of contributing her little mite towards the happiness of two young creatures, so precious to her as were the fragile girl, her younger sister, and her dearly beloved nephew, Frank Egerton. Miss Templeton must not positively put any difficulties in the way of their, as she trusted, quickly-approaching nuptials being celebrated, on dearest Frank's return to Valetta, from their own residence. Nothing in the world could give either herself or Mr. Cunningham intenser happiness than to arrange the whole affair; and should Miss Templeton herself be tempted to brave the ocean in order to stand beside her cherished one at that most thrilling of all moments—the one in which the irrevocable vows were pronounced at the altar—she could only add, from the very depths of her soul, a heart-felt welcome to Citta Vittorosa.

Augusta's epistle was like herself—blunt, warm-hearted, and sincere. She was sorry, very sorry, to part from Rachel; thought people who fell in love, as Frank had done, before they had any business to think of anything but attending to business, made great fools of themselves, and often ran their heads into difficulties it was no easy task to run them out of: that, however, was his and Rachel's concern, not hers.—some people preferred love in an

Australian log-house to riches in a comfortable English one; Rachel might have made any match she liked; all Valetta were at her feet—to say nothing of the broken hearts floating at random in the harbour. However, a wilful woman “maun ha’ her way”—and the Templetons being, without exception, from Arthur downwards, the most wilful family ever created, and it being of no avail to use argument with people whose minds had been previously made up to act the ridiculous, she (Augusta) had made up hers—to act the guardian angel, head-bridesmaid, tire-woman, or any other office the coming marriage might devolve upon her towards that saucy-mouthed, rosy-cheeked bit of a thing sitting opposite, and looking so provokingly happy. If Frank did not make her a good husband, he deserved to be guillotined; but, upon the whole, she had hopes of him in the future—roughing the world had already done him good, though headstrong he always was, and, spite of her cousinly example in the opposite direction, always would be. As to her mamma, May need not on that score feel herself under any very overwhelming obligations, the said good lady being in a state of delightful excitement, and by no means indifferent to the *éclat* of having the beautiful Miss Templeton, the “belle of Valetta,” as Rachel was already christened—the intimate friend, too, of Lord St. Clair and Lady Adelaide Mansfield—married from her house. Her mother fully appreciated the “poetry,” as she was pleased to term it, of such a *finale* to their travels, and was entranced beyond the power of words to express, that her own fragile health should have been the unconscious, though intensely-blessed cause of the sweet little romance in real life.

“Curiously enough, too,” said May, looking up from Augusta’s letter, “that Arthur should have spoken of spending a few days at Malta on his way home, and would

arrive there, on calculation, about the time—or, perhaps, rather before Mr. Egerton's return."

The whole course of events were thus wonderfully marked out by the Hand whose guiding May was accustomed to trace out, and descry in every, even the least, circumstance of her daily life.

Mr. Egerton's countenance, as, hastening away on business some few degrees less interesting than the one just concluded, he shook hands with old Phoebe in the doorway, slipping a sovereign, for the sake of "auld lang syne" (as Frank whispered), into her hand—told its own tale.

"That fellow looks jolly enough, anyhow," was the mental exclamation of many a careworn fellow-traveller, along life and London's busy streets that morning—weary faces, furrowed faces, harrassed faces, ay, even despairing faces, were passing by in crowds unnoticed. The jolly-looking fellows, the merry laughing girls, were stared at, as on the morning in question they arose for a moment, and then vanished out of sight. They were the exceptions—others were the rule; the commonplace, and therefore disregarded, inhabitants.

Day succeeded to day, week to week, and still Lady Adelaide lingered at Haseldyne. The earl, who became imperceptibly weaker, would not hear of her leaving him; St. Clair was on the way home to his father's death-bed—the news of the earl's seizure having been telegraphed to the young nobleman, with all the speed then possible; but of this, May was yet ignorant, Adelaide never having—whether designedly or not, we leave to inference—alluded to his return, in her frequent bulletins from Haseldyne of the earl's state of health, addressed to either Miss Templeton or Lucia. The latter's grief at being separated from her mamma, who must be wearing herself out, said Lucia, with

all that nursing, and whose labours it would be such comfort, such happiness to share in, at length induced Lady Adelaide to risk the experiment of sending for her darling ; thus leaving May, once more, alone in Hamilton Street. Alone, but no longer desolate. The past, and its bitter memories, may at times overcloud her spirit, but brighter visions rise to dispel them. Rachel was happy ; Arthur about to be rewarded ; Algie—why sigh at the remembrance—safe in Patria. “ And St. Clair—what of him ? ” inquired a voice within, at times—a voice hard to stifle, but silenced, nevertheless, by one still louder—the voice of a resolute will. There was ground in that direction she must not, she dare not adventure on ; no, not ever so lightly. A hope self-relinquished may not, with safety, be self-awakened. A love buried out of sight, as hers had been, must be shrouded in its grave-clothes still, unless a voice, not her own, bid it arise once more and live. And May was right : St. Clair’s character, though gentle enough in many respects, was stern also—stern above all things in this one requirement, both for himself and others, sincerity of *action*, purpose, and intention, no less than actual word of honour. May Templeton had disappointed him. Long ago had the injury been forgiven ; but to him henceforth she presented no longer the mirror of the past—the mirror of a truthfulness at once transparent and unsullied. So much for St. Clair’s reflection, even if aware of his once idol’s present freedom ; but of this, at present, he was not only ignorant in the abstract, but in detail must ever remain so. He had learnt to think of May as engaged to another. The fact might be unlearnt in time, but not the remembrance of that engagement having once existed ; not the memory of May, his loved and trusted one, having *once* deceived him ; and that deception—could its motive never be explained ? The question need scarcely be mooted. No

true woman's heart but will long ago have answered in the negative, by all her love for Rachel—nay, beyond this even—by all her reverence for knowledge gained in the unconscious moments of delirium—*NEVER*. By a chasm, scarcely less wide than the one for the last weary twelvemonths yawning between them, were St. Clair and Rachel's sister henceforth and for ever separated.]

Mrs. St. Aubyn was staying at Dover when the news of Arthur Templeton's being expected home in a few days reached her from his sister. She wrote immediately back to Hamilton Street, inviting May to run down to her house at once, and thus be ready to greet the traveller on disembarking. The proposal was gratefully acceded to. Mrs. St. Aubyn's kindness since Mrs. Templeton's death and Lord St. Clair's departure, had been almost motherly in its demonstration towards the lonely girls, in whose situation though never personally placed herself, she could, nevertheless, most fully sympathize. Whether as regarded Lord St. Clair, the silent though penetrating Mrs. St. Aubyn might not have guessed at possibilities more nearly approaching the truth than even she, May, or Rachel dreamed of, is uncertain, the only result of her cogitations being, as just observed, an increased amount of interest in all that concerned the orphan sister of Hamilton Street; May therefore arrived in Dover a day before her brother's arrival was expected. His last letter, dated from Marseilles, had given a long and minute account of little Rachel's wedding at Valetta; the description lengthened out sufficiently even for her *exigant* curiosity, from the blessing of the ring in the church of the Knight's Templar to the very lace on the bride's fair head.

"He need not tell her," said Arthur, "how beautiful Rachel had looked in her bridal attire. That part of his information being, no doubt, superfluous."

His acquaintance with Egerton, short as it had necessarily been, had prepossessed him to no small extent in his favour. Rachel's husband having been so warm a friend of his dear mother's was, however, the greater recommendation of the two. The bride and bridegroom had departed, after their marriage, on a three weeks' visit to Citta Vecchia, leaving him, meanwhile, in the care of the Cunninghams, who certainly outdid in eccentricity—the young lady especially—any family he had before made acquaintance with. Their kindness to Rachel, however, had completely won the fond brother's heart; he was really disposed to think that, after all, odd people were the more unselfish ones of the world.

The "Lady Bird," Egerton's ship, had borne away its precious cargo the day before; the little French vessel, containing himself and young Godwin, was starting for Marseilles. Within four or five days from the date of Arthur's letter the writer hoped to be in England, not intending one moment longer than was absolutely necessary to linger on the way. Charley Godwin proposed remaining in Paris for the next month to come; his married sister, the lovely Ellen of former days, and her husband, having settled to meet him there, and insisting on securing the young ex-captain's society for the rest of the summer.

"Sight-seeing, however," said Arthur, "had little charm for somebody else's brother, when his own May was looking out for him in dear old England. They must manage to come abroad together for a few weeks ere he and Godwin entered on their novitiate. She had guessed rightly on that point; thank God! In a moment of excitement, the one in which his boy friend—for as yet he would think of him in no more respectful light—had started for the battle; the promise, should the then lieutenant survive the engagement, of entering with him into the Jesuit novi-

tiate, allowing the young officer's purse to dispense at once with all difficulties, now standing in Arthur's way, had been then ceded by the latter; nor had it ever been regretted. The pride which in former days might have forbid the possibility of thus placing himself under pecuniary obligations to another, and that not only a younger man than himself, and bound to him by no tie, even of distant relationship to his family, had ceased to exist within the breast of one vowed to "solemn service high" in the cause of One whose chiefest glory, had ever been to joy in humiliation.

"He was thankful"—thus wrote Arthur—"to accept this little drop of penance in the cup of happiness so unexpectedly poured out and presented to his taste, and to have another beside himself, one moreover, till within the last two years as careless of the eternal hereafter as of the life he was now so ready to peril in that hereafter's service—eager as himself to sacrifice all things in the attainment of the distant prize; this had filled the chalice to the brim. What happy days meanwhile would he and May spend together in the world—their world—their own beautiful old world down at Haseldyne. They would take a cottage there, near Father Paul's little house, with whom, for the present, he meant to study; and how they would visit and revisit all the old haunts of their childhood. Why are sorrow and joy never here long separated? May's eyes filled with tears at the warning words: the haunts of their childhood—Haseldyne and St. Clair. Ah, Arthur! to you, but no longer to her, will the visit be one of unmixed delight."

It was a lovely afternoon, the one May arrived at Dover—the flutter of Mrs. St. Aubyn's dress on the platform being the first sight to greet the traveller's eye on the train's arrival; and no one but they who have suffered much and

suffered alone may tell how insignificant acts of consideration such as these are appreciated by the less cared-for ones of this world. More closely than before became Mrs. St. Aubyn that day entwined into the heart, long ago drawn involuntarily to love the proud cold-mannered woman of drawing-room remembrance. The two friends walked down to the beach, and sat there watching the tide's approach till dinner time. It was May's first visit to the seaside, and like all novices in their acquaintance with old ocean, great was her enthusiasm. She had never imagined it to be half as beautiful, and could no longer conceive the interpretation of Mrs. Hemans having declared her favourite description of heaven to be that of a place where there is "no more sea." To Mrs. St. Aubyn's observation of her never having seen poor Mrs. Hemans's dreaded enemy, save under its present smiling aspect, May asserted that to behold those lovely waves lashed into fury would be to her mind magnificent beyond conception. It would, she felt certain, make her long even more than ever to be sailing over its restless waters. She would insist upon Arthur's taking her out some day in a storm. They would array themselves in life-preservers, and try to persuade Mrs. St. Aubyn to be of the party. But the lady shook her head. Life-preservers were not terror-preservers. She envied May's courage, but had greater sympathy with the shrinking poetess.

A bedroom had been contrived for Arthur's sister, looking out on the sea—that was charming; but what to-night would have been otherwise? All things in earth and ocean were *couleur de rose*—one of those bright gleams in life which at times shed intense radiance over the darkness of the rest lit up May's world this evening. Going to bed was an event not to be dreamt of, save by ordinary mortals not created for the same atmosphere as herself. It is no

wonder they never sleep in heaven, thought the girl, opening her little window on retiring for the night. They are too happy. The over happy cannot sleep. There were fresh flowers on her table, and a telescope; by whom placed there, but by Mrs. St. Aubyn—dear, dear Mrs. St. Aubyn. She was childish to-night—quite beside herself, was May, and kissing the flowers, she placed them beneath the moonlight, deeming, like a silly care-forgetting child, they would be, like herself, more happy there than in the dark; and then for long blessed hours did she sit beside them, the ocean, like one huge sheet of transparent silver spread before her gaze; the waves, with their one sweet song rolling ceaselessly on shore, reminding her, in some sort, of church-bells in Advent, on cold frosty nights, when the village ringers are practising for Christmastide. Christmas is coming, say the bells then. Arthur is coming, say the waves to-night—Arthur is coming. Algie's voice seemed at times to mingle with the words—only with her name attached—Arthur is coming, May dear—May—May, re-echoed the sound, as again and again the billows rolled on, to retire almost sadly back once more—disappointed perchance, because for one brief second alone might they rest on the cold repelling shore. Are they weary, then, those crested waves—weary of rolling on for ever and ever with that same monotonous roar. Wish they their task completed, as when weary of fighting life's battle human wrestlers are apt to do, venturing sometimes even to implore that the next heavy wave may be the last? Ah, idle waves! Ah, idle hearts! why murmur? Work bravely on; 'twill soon be over. A moment, and there shall be no more sea.

Thus ran not May Templeton's thoughts to-night, however; the waves had all the grumbling outside there on the beach in the moonlight, while she, with her calm soft eye, did little else than reprove their petulance. As to May's thoughts, joy, and joy alone, formed the beginning and end

of the listener's meditation. Arthur was coming, coming to-morrow—nay, to-day, at five o'clock; and he would be in her arms,—her darling—her long-exiled—her only brother—her only one at least *here*. There *was another*, not far distant, more even than in life unutterably precious; and yet—for we are but human—and to the invisible as to the visible love, few have the faith to cling; it was a restful though a blessed memory that, to shelter her in *this* world—another was returning. Do the happy never sleep, laughed the sun, as wishing the sea a very polite but rather abrupt good morning, he caught the boaster with folded arms lying on the window-sill beside the flowers, who, in sheer gratitude for her considerate behaviour the foregoing midnight, had scattered a shower of superfluous leaves over the sleeper.

"No great protection, though," impertinently (so thought the leaves), said Mrs. St. Aubyn, creeping early into her favourite's bed-room that morning, afraid lest the oppression of the atmosphere and excitement of expecting her brother might have disturbed May's rest. A wiser woman, perhaps a stronger minded one, without the shadow of a doubt, would have aroused the somnambulist-looking young lady, lying there in her white muslin dress, never taken off from the preceding evening, and would have bid her go to bed at once, and not be ridiculous. Mrs. St. Aubyn, we are sorry to relate, did nothing of the kind; but simply throwing a veil, with fairy-like touch, over May's head, and shawl round her shoulders, and desiring no one to disturb Miss Templeton, she left Dame Nature to awake her, thinking it perhaps a pity to disturb anything so peacefully happy, on the very improbable chance of common sense hushing it to rest again.

Mrs. St. Aubyn had not, after all, acted injudiciously; let our strong-minded friends contradict us if they will: two hours more sleep, a happy, waking, bright cheek, and merry, if not over hearty breakfast, being the result of her

seaside romance, as May, always ready to join in a laugh against herself, was quite willing to allow it. The beach again after breakfast, and a long morning's chat under the shelter of the cliff—for Mrs. St. Aubyn, spite of May's entreaties, who, to-day had strength for anything, would hear of no walking about till evening,—passed the time pleasantly enough away till two o'clock, when in place of the preceding heat, a breeze sprung up from the north-west, which increasing rapidly, the afternoon promised to be sufficiently cool and windy for a walk on the coast till five, the hour of hours to May, that day, no less possibly than to others—the hour of the English boat's arrival from Calais. The walk, much to the whole party's disappointment, was, however, destined to arrive at a speedy termination, the wind, at three o'clock, not only having blown itself into a passionate hurricane, but the rain, by way of keeping company with her ill-tempered acquaintance, beginning to pour in torrents. Mrs. St. Aubyn tried hard not to feel nervous, or, at all events to hinder any one, especially May, from remarking it. A glance, nevertheless, at her husband, who appeared to have become altogether wedded to his telescope, or at the waves, which every moment increased in size and anger did not tend to reassure her spirits. As to May herself, neither wind nor rain would deter her from the pier. Danger to Arthur she dreamt not of at first—hope having taken too deep a hold on that trustful heart to be easily dethroned. One intense desire alone possessed her—to be upon those waves beside Arthur, watching, hand in hand with him, a scene of whose grandeur no painter's representations had ever pictured to her the reality. God in his majesty seemed, as it were, for the first time visibly before her. In the flowers, the starlight, the trees and forest of her native home, in the pure faces of little children, on the brow of the holy dead, and in things more awful though more hidden than these had she beheld His love-

liness; but now as the deafening roar of waters mingled with the sound of distant thunder drowning the voices of a thousand standers-by, echoed through her soul, while flash after flash of brilliant light rainbowed the billows now rising mountains high, far as eye could reach, in their giant strength around their Creator's POWER appalled her—*appalled*, but did not *terrify*; for, above the ocean's fury arose a whisper—the whisper of a loving heart, and “Our Father who art in heaven” were the words it uttered—absorbed in the contemplation of the storm, and forgetful for the moment of aught beside.

May was startled by a cry from the pier. Had she heard aright? It was repeated: “The English packet in sight!” Springing from Mr. St. Aubyn's arm, who had followed her to the pier in the vain hope of persuading her to accompany him home, she hastened—nay, flew past the by-standers—to the edge of the pier. More than one hand held out a telescope—the boat was scarcely visible without one; seizing the first mechanically, it dropped from her hand. She turned to apologize, but the lender had disappeared. That face of extasy in the moment of—had she known the truth—all but despair, had frightened him away. Another and another were presented, but smilingly declined. The streaming eye on that dark speck in the distance needed no telescope to magnify its vision. Nearer and nearer it came, the trim little packet, struggling—panting through the heaving waters, victory, as May thought, written on its very weakness. The wind and waters rose simultaneously; the packet for a minute lies hidden from their view, and May, clings to Mr. St. Aubyn, for the first time, the possibility of danger crosses her imagination. No one spoke, not aloud, at least, but many prayed—would that all prayers were as earnest.

“They are lowering the boats,” exclaimed many a voice, as a lull in the tempest allowed the voices to be heard.

"Thank God, they are all in safety," after five minutes of breathless suspense, whispered Mr. St. Aubyn. "It is all right now."

"You mean in ten minutes," said some one standing near; "in ten minutes they are safe; and lucky chaps they may think themselves to have weathered such a gale."

"Ten minutes, did he say?" counting her fingers—she could not speak aloud—whispered May. "Is it possible; ten minutes more, and in Arthur's arms; Oh, God! how good Thou art."

The boat is soon hidden from sight, but that, say all around, goes for nothing. Who would expect otherwise in such a sea? There it is again, riding gallantly on high. Good boat—dear boat—angel boat; and now, O Father in heaven, she sees his face—her own Arthur's face—that long absent—that face intensely loved. It must be his, and yet can any eye pierce that blinding spray. Ah, blinding indeed must be the spray, love like hers may fail to pierce through. *He sees her*—he waves his hand! A loud cheer from the shore they have just reached. Arthur's eyes met those of May: the hill at Haseldyne rises before her, and the echo—the mocking echo for ever—ever—ever! It is caught up by an agonizing shriek, as the boat is cast back into the surging waters. Oh, God! Thy ways are not our ways, nor Thy thoughts our thoughts. Close your eyes, May; yes, lay there and rest awhile, thou broken flower—thou well-beloved of Him who to His Virgin Mother and the disciple of His bosom imparted a deeper fellowship in His sufferings, as hereafter, in His joys. Open your eyes once more, May, and fear not to look out again on that darksome, dreary wave-land. It is but a little while, ay, perchance but a very little, and the sea shall give up its dead!—thy brother shall rise again.

CHAPTER XXV.

“ I could interpret between
You and your love.”—HAMLET.

It was the morrow after the Dover shipwreck, and the Belgravian world had expended the full amount of sighs due to an event in which, as it fortunately happened, none of her own beloved were concerned, and had begun to vary the subject by remarking what a mercy young Captain Godwin, who, but for his sister, Lady Lonsdale's arrangement, would infallibly have been a passenger in that ill-fated packet, had been spared to his noble family. A young man of fortune and military renown, his loss in that fearful gale, just on the point, too, of reaching shore, would have been too terrible. Providence, decided Belgravia, with a simultaneous nod of mental approbation, had acted discreetly. With what intense pathos had not the *Times* daguerreotyped the scene, poor things!—it was enough to make one's heart ache. The next paragraph, and Providence, shipwrecks, sufferers, and heartaches were alike forgotten; like dissolving panoramas had they melted out of sight, while another picture, and one, to judge from the eager looks directed at the paper, of more than the usually absorbing interest, presented itself to the readers.

“ An Elopement in High Life.—The Lady Diana Montague, only surviving daughter of the Duke of —, and the wife of Ralph Beresford Montague, Esq., M.P. of Cheshire, with Sir Allen Mansfield, of — Priory, Devonshire. The lady's brother had started in pursuit of the fugitives. The same train conveying him to Folkestone, *en route* to

Boulogne, was supposed to have carried Lord St. Clair, now Earl of Morley, to his father's death-bed; the old nobleman having, after a painful and lingering illness, expired early that morning." Thus the news of the day concluded, and Belgravia upraised her eye, but whether in mute appeal to the ceiling, or to the heaven far beyond it would be hard to say, as expressing unutterable horrors, she proceeded to the all-important business of breakfast. Fashionable digestion must not be put out of order; moreover, it is curious the effect news of this startling and melancholy kind has in provoking the appetites of London, and, for all we know to the contrary, country breakfasters also. Many a dowager ladyship, rustling musically in her silk flounces, that morning announced, with all the mysterious *empressement* of a being endowed with prophetic knowledge, that long ago had this unhappy *dénouement* been by one who, like herself, had leisure and opportunity to dive below the surface of external events, forseen in the distance, recompensing at the same time her inner woman for the said sibyl-like foreknowledge by an extra plover's egg and the smallest imaginable trifle of the Westphalia ham on the sideboard. The gentlemen almost universally voted Sir Allen a great fool for neglecting that splendid creature, Lady Adelaide; and some of the younger ladies, the married ones especially, pitied the deserted wife and insulted woman from their very souls.

Thus much for the outward drama—the scene before the curtain; but what of the dreary one behind? Let us step aside and behold a far different company; strange faces there meet our view. A room, oppressive from its very grandeur—scent, or perfume, striving vainly to exclude the all but *felt* presence Death, whether in the palace or the cottage, claims the power to throw around his victim. In the centre of that room, richly emblazoned, but unable

alike to conceal either purpose or name—the pauper's name for his last workhouse donation—is laid a coffin; within those narrow boards lies the late Earl of Morley, standing by his side the present one—the yesterday's heir, to-day's possessor of all this fleeting grandeur. The little hour's magnificence departed—that his final resting-place. Those painted boards, that gilded dwelling,—well may the new earl, in the strength and beauty of his proud manhood, turn shudderingly away. In another apartment, scarcely less princely-like in decoration, kneels a woman—once its young proud mistress—young still, and beautiful withal, but proud no longer—sunk in deepest humiliation; the scorned, degraded wife of one it was her own free-will to call by the sacred name of husband. She drinks to the last bitter dreg her lesson of retribution. Under that roof, nigh that very room, she dared her fate. Let her accept its fulfilment. The task is not rejected, no, nor the bowed head, symbol of the still more deeply lowered heart, left disregarded. “*Cor contritum et humiliatum Deus non despicies.*” Half in tearful sympathy—would none were as often feigned—half in fawning humility, the dowager countess hovered near her step-son. Adelaide, even she, dauntless woman, dared not approach, though her own, not Adelaide's heart now formed the barrier. Every attention, notwithstanding, being lavished on her comfort, as neither the present earl nor his favourite sister could any longer with safety be treated with indifference, for if no longer mistress, the countess relinquished not hope of being the oft-invited, the ever-welcome honoured mother of the late earl's elder children. Nay, the possibility of winning their regard by, in due course of time, joining the “same mode of faith they had thought fit to adopt,” more than once crossed the “nothing-venture-nothing-have” mind of the ex-countess of Morley. Lord St. Clair's, “Oh, indeed;” however, when

an idea of this kind was on one occasion partly hinted at in the young nobleman's presence, at once set her ladyship's wits to work in another and more secular direction. Religious discussions, with such a matter-of-fact, knock-you-down sort of man like the new earl was on the whole, perhaps, settled the countess quite at last to her own and every one else's satisfaction, better avoided. "An honest Mahomedan, if you will, but no unreality," she had once overheard St. Clair answer in reply to a question as to what class of individuals he preferred arguing with on religious topics. "Unreality," re-echoed the countess, "that from some people means more than meets the ear; from Lord St. Clair a great deal more. No, that plan must be abandoned. It would still be her duty to cling to the religion of her ancestors." On the opening of the earl's will it, moreover, became evident, even to the serpent-like brain of the Countess of Morley, how little real necessity existed for her acting otherwise than wholly independently of her step-son—the whole of the late earl's unentailed property, including a pretty little seat not many miles distant from the metropolis, having been left at her and her children's disposal, by her well-tutored, if not over-attached partner. No sooner, therefore, was the lamented husband's funeral decently over, than the countess, inspired by an unaccountable fit of consideration for others, announced her intention of at once quitting Haseldyne; thus leaving her poor children, St. Clair and Lady Adelaide, to the solitude neither one nor the other, she felt certain, would for the present feel aught but thankful to abandon themselves to. After doing and saying to the utmost bounds of sincerity—all his father's wife might consider her due—in the way of invitations to remain at the park, St. Clair relinquished his entreaties, and gladly, for Adelaide's sake,

if for no less unselfish consideration, witnessed his lady-mother and her small tribe's departure for Crownhurst.

The young earl's sole object in life now appeared to centre in Adelaide. It was a touching sight enough to watch the brother and sister, once more together in the home of their childhood. Both in one sense the same, and yet, in another, both how changed. On the brow of each a tale written, no eye save one well-skilled in a somewhat intricate physiognomy might comprehend. Lucia, or "Sunbeam," St. Clair's name for Adelaide's Italian darling, now their only companion, managed, with her little winning tact, her frequent absence on exploring expeditions among the gardens and shrubbery, or in missions to Father Paul's infant school down at the village built by poor Mr. Templeton in days of affluence, and ever since his death under the peculiar patronage of Lord St. Clair, not only to avoid the possibility of being considered *de trop*, but to have won for herself the sunny appellation, spite of the mournful expression still shadowing her strangely beautiful eyes, bestowed on her by mamma's tall grave brother, that kind new uncle, Lord St. Clair. Has Adelaide in the day of her humiliation forgotten her way of sheer contradiction to all world-established rule ; forgotten one, who in the hour of her pride, no voice—let the said old world rave as it would—no voice might dared to have accused the proud lady of neglecting ; and yet, if not, why is the fellow-mourner, as once the fellow-merry-maker, absent from the reassembled little circle at Haseldyne. Surely if any one need comfort, she most of all ; surely if rest, it is to be found in those quiet woodland-forests, beside the streams whose very murmuring whisper of peace ; or within that church, now to herself, as to May long years ago, the gladdest spot on earth, the last relic of him who lays beneath its shadow, she should be invited,

may, urged in her present hour of loneliness, there to seek a few weeks repose.

Father Paul, next to her brother, Adelaide's dearest friend at Haseldyne, ventured on one occasion to suggest this arrangement. He could not help thinking that both on her own account and Miss Templeton's, the visit might prove one of real comfort and blessing. "How curious he should have spoken of it," exclaimed Adelaide, all her former ardour returning. To have May Templeton once more at Haseldyne was and had been for many a week the dream of her existence; an opportunity of opening the proposal to her brother being her only obstacle, he having, since their father's death, shrunk from inviting even the most intimate of their former visitors to the park. Adelaide did not add to this her own half-repugnance, mixed with a something more than half-feverish determination to open the subject with St. Clair. Fear and hope—love for him and reverence for May—had as yet closed her lips; but that very evening, the ice should be broken, the experiment be hazarded, at worst it could but prove a failure, thought Adelaide, leaving behind the satisfaction of having done her best to clear away the mystery others, not themselves, she felt persuaded had, through some mischance or other, thrown around her brother and his once darling May. No sooner, therefore, had Lucia departed on her usual after-dinner ramble round the shrubbery, than Adelaide, taking out her knitting—a lady's surest indication of coming talkativeness—artfully enough, it must be confessed, threw down the gauntlet by observing how much Lucia, though in many respects very different, reminded her in others of Rachel Templeton at the same age. St. Clair perfectly agreed, pronouncing, in addition, an earnest hope that neither Lucia nor Rachel would lose, as women, that

beautiful simple-mindedness so marked a characteristic of their earlier life. Having advanced thus far, Adelaide's next allusion was to Arthur—dear Arthur, and that awful shipwreck. But here St. Clair's face paled too suddenly; he looked faint and ill. On that subject, not even to his darling Adelaide, could he as yet speak with calmness.

Arthur Templeton had been to him something more than friend, or even brother. St. Clair's and Arthur's school-boy intimacy had ripened into that deepest perhaps of all friendships, the one existing between two men equally matched in talent, learning, and intellect, and equally bent, though in different spheres, on one absorbing pursuit in life—the exaltation (and that in the word's highest interpretation) of their race.

Distressed at the agonized expression her words had called up on that dear face, Adelaide would, however loth, at once have changed the conversation, had not an inward voice, in all but imperative tones, urged its continuation. Trembling, therefore, between nervous apprehension of inflicting fresh distress, and hope at arriving at a far different result,—“I have been thinking,” she hurried on, “and so has Father Paul, only we thought it best, at least, to wait a little, how much it might tend to soften dearest May's bereavement, were we to invite her for a month or two down here. A long rest among these old haunts, with those who, like ourselves, can now more than ever sympathize in her feelings, might be of infinite use to her; and it is terrible to think of the poor child shut up again in that desolate house in Hamilton Street, where, I understand, on the St. Aubyns' return to London, she has once more chosen to immure herself, carrying—so Father Paul tells me—an innumerable party of orphan children to fill the spare rooms, and knock up the little remaining strength

left from that Dover illness. What say you, St. Clair?—the *master* of the house, methinks, not his sister, should by rights, be the one both to suggest and convey the invitation to our poor little May.”

St. Clair did not start from his seat, or perform any of the various spasmodic evolutions often attributed to lovers under similar *contretemps*. Taking a book from the table, and turning over the leaves as though anxious for nothing so much at that particular moment as a few leisure ones for reading, he bid Adelaide, with more than accustomed affectionateness of tone, to remember that his house and *hers* were henceforth terms synonymous,—it would pain him ever again to speak as if it could be otherwise. Did she think it would give Miss Templeton (Adelaide winced at the “Miss”) any, even the smallest consolation to visit Haseldyne, let her, without a day’s delay, be invited; at the same time, he ventured to disagree with both good Father Paul and herself in believing the invitation would be either wished for or accepted. They could but try, however, and the very news of his own absence from home, the next three weeks, on business connected with his father’s will and the countess might possibly be an inducement to Miss Templeton—if no other argument prevailed—to cheer his sister and Lucia’s solitude meanwhile.”

“But,” said Adelaide, looking up abruptly, determined once and for ever to bring this misunderstanding to an explanation,—“why must May—or Miss Templeton—since you prefer that title St. Clair, be supposed to prefer visiting Haseldyne during its master’s absence, as your proposal naturally leads one to infer. Forgive me for venturing to ask a plain question, dearest brother; but have you and May, like the rest of the universe, thought fit since we last—last all met together—to get up, either on your own or some one else’s account, that most un-Maylike catastrophe—a

quarrel?—and if, on the strength of my sisterly attachment for May, no less than yourself, I may intrude still further into the mystery, whence the complaint, and who the culprit, Lord St. Clair, *alias* Lord of Morley, or Miss Templeton, *alias* Queen of Hearts? Do you remember, St. Clair,” she continued, more gravely, seeing him turn the book before him with a hand, the almost imperceptible trembling of which her eye failed not to discern,—“do you remember the old maxim—or rather, as I guess the one invented by yourself for the especial edification of a certain little Lady Adelaide some ten or twelve years ago, continually dinned into that certain little lady’s ear when possessed by a spirit, from childhood to old age—seldom absent from us poor mortals’ side? Come now, St. Clair, repeat it to me, like a good obedient boy. I delight in seeing people act up to their own principles.”

St. Clair smiled sadly—“‘Life is too short for quarrelling;’—was that the one you allude to, Addie? If so, behold the slave of the lamp! he has said.”

“So far, well done, brother mine; but now for the practical illustration as regards yourself and May, St. Clair.”

“We have not quarrelled, or are ever likely to do so, Adelaide,” was the short reply; and then turning full towards her, “but why should there be any longer concealments or mysteries between you and me, Addie? Recollect our old compact—mutual confidence, acknowledged trust.”

“Ah!” groaned Adelaide inwardly, “if but in days past by, she had on her side fulfilled the childish treaty!”

“Let us then, once and for ever,” he hurried on, “speak of and then drop this painful—this, yes, I confess it—this to me terrible subject.”

She let him proceed, not from woman’s curiosity—for

woman's love was greater, and would fain have spared him the recital—but he must be suffered to proceed because, down here, alas! we too often lack the power to heal without first probing to the quick, whether in the physical or moral world, our fellow-sufferers' wounds!

"The tale is told in few words, my sister," continued the young lord.

Adelaide caught his look: it was that of a man twenty years older than St. Clair; and tears bitter, though never before so wholly void of self-love, rose to the sister's watching eye.

"I loved her, Adelaide, as men seldom love—perhaps never ought to love any woman, any creature, however fair, however faultless—and she rejected me. It is an oft-told tale—there let it end!"

"Nay, on the contrary," cried Adelaide, her girlish enthusiasm returning to voice and manner, "there let it begin, St. Clair. You loved her—of course you did; who could know her as we did, and help it; and she in return——. Come, come, let me have my say out. She in return loved you, and though 'I say it who should not say it,' according to cottage proverbs, who could well help that either. Now do not contradict me with that blank look, St. Clair. I know better than you. Leave a woman to understand a woman. May Templeton—begging her pardon as a lady for letting a conceited man like yourself into her little heart secrets—has, I am confident, always cared, and if I mistake not, always *will care*, a vast deal more for a certain individual sitting opposite to me, and looking wondrously like a day in November, than that same incredulous personage has the smallest right to expect from any woman—let alone that woman being the dearest of all possible angels, her own fair self."

"Stop, Adelaide, no more of this," said St. Clair, pe-

remptorily. "Thank you a thousand times, in spite of its wildness, for your little loving sympathy; but your imagination, from the beginning to the end, must have wholly misled you. As regards Miss Templeton, she is, and has been for the last two years almost, engaged to another. Do not mistake me, Addie; I have no feeling of bitterness towards her. Why, indeed, should I? She was very young, and I was foolish enough to mistake her girlish friendship for a deeper feeling. My life's first prayer has ever since been for her happiness. God alone may tell what I have suffered at each heavy storm of sorrow He has permitted to fall on that—yes, I will say it, Adelaide—that dear head; for dear must she and all belonging to her ever be to me. In years to come—nay, positively, if necessary, even *now*,—through strength not my own, I will school myself to meet, and to be to her all that friend or brother may be. But for both our sakes, I feel that at present the invitation to Haseldyne had best be set aside. We have surely no right by our own act and deed to make the daily petition, 'lead us not into temptation,' an unreality, Adelaide!"

"Certainly not, any more than we have the right to trifle with the happiness God may see fit to place within our reach," she answered. "Listen, dearest of brothers," she said, seating herself in Lucia-like fashion at his feet; "and believe the oracle of Haseldyne when she bids you remember that some women never *love twice*—that is twice in one year,—which, by the way, taking into consideration an example not unfrequently set before them, by the lords of the creation, is something to boast of in their behalf.

May Templeton happens—whether happily or unhappily I leave others to decide—to be one of these remarkably-constant individuals. And May Templeton, when I left England—you don't deserve to have this repeated, remember, St. Clair, for no woman, not even a sister, unless under the

very peculiar circumstances Lady Adelaide just now finds herself placed in, has any business whatever to tell tales of another. Some day, however, I will ask the much-insulted May's forgiveness, if need be, for having betrayed my self-acquired knowledge by speaking the truth—for truth it is, neither more nor less, that when I left England, two years ago, May's little heart—if she possess one at all—was safe in your keeping. As to that long fit of reserve my silly—no less than *your*—self thought proper to consider so terrible a grievance, the explanation was, somewhat unjustifiably, I must confess, wormed by your dearest of sisters out of the present exile of the seas, Rachel Egerton, under the promise of keeping the said inveigled information a dead secret from every human being, your lordship included, who I fancied would, after my departure, have had the sense to win an interpretation of May's self-willed conduct from the young lady's own mouth."

"What do you mean, Adelaide?" exclaimed her brother, roused for a moment from the fit of despondency cast over him by the foregoing conversation.

"Why, I mean this much—that, to save her old friends pain, May, poor girl, was working hard all that spring—not only by professional concert-singing, to support her mother and the rest, who had, owing to one of those bank failures, lost the whole of their little income,—but also to conceal from ourselves the fact of her being thus harassed, fearing, no doubt, with her usual sensitiveness, to disturb either our serenity or our pockets."

"May sing in public!" exclaimed St. Clair, aloud, "our ——"

"Haseldyne violet, you would say; never mind, St. Clair, I will finish the sentence for you;—and how could I, by my silence, have sanctioned the proceeding? is not that the Lord of Morley's next reproach? Well, I did my best,

in my quiet way, but Rachel's commands as to secrecy were imperative, and my own funds at that time little able to cope with our poor friend's difficulties; and besides, St. Clair, I did so hope, so firmly believe, that in a very few months, *t most*—but never mind my hopes now,—they were destined not to be fulfilled. I begin to dive into the mystery more clearly now, however. You mistook May's reserve for ——”

“No, Adelaide,” was the eager rejoinder, “I did not; I was hurt, pained, distressed—but never for one moment doubted her—her—you know what I mean,—till afterwards, not till from her own hand ——”

“I thought as much, St. Clair,—*hand* not *voice*, then, conveyed the intelligence;—not till from her own *hand* you learnt she was engaged to another. At this point we must pause,” said Adelaide, in a tone whose self-reproachful humility there was no mistaking. “Let those who, under a mistaken sense of duty, have run the risk, as it strikes me our Haseldyne violet has done, of endangering their whole life's happiness, confess both themselves and May to have, however unwittingly, erred from the path of wisdom. She and I meet not here on equal ground: I have but to bow my head in reverence before the purity of intention, the forgetfulness of self, of personal inclination, of which she has, not for the first time, set me the example; but this I do know, that, whether on account of your rank in the world and her family's altered position, the fear of their deprecating an alliance externally beneath you, or some other far-fetched and Platonic motive of not interfering with other people's duties, she thought right to place this barrier between you: the effort has cost an amount of suffering it would break even your hard heart, St. Clair, to witness the outward symptoms of. When I returned to England last autumn, Arthur and Algernon were both alive, May

and St. Clair, God bless him ! is ever the most obliging of brothers. Farewell till tea-time, Earl of Morley—the oracle has ceased to advise.” And waving her hand gaily towards him, Lady Adelaide sprang through the open casement, and in another moment was clasped in the arms of Lucia.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ For He, through paths they have not known, .
Will lead His own.”—LADY EMILY PONSONBY.

READER! are you an author? If so, and not an independent one, need we to crave your sympathy on having arrived at the end of our story. Doubtless it is already given, and, spite of its defects, you wish us all success. If no author, patient reader, we thank you then still more gratefully for having, spite of many a yawn, and more than one skipped page, arrived at the end of our story; nor will we detain you much longer. A few words only of farewell to those beside whose varied pathways through our wilderness we have for a while been journeying.

To begin with Rachel, our once little exile, now no longer so, as, eight years of banishment having expired, she, her husband, and three golden-headed little girls, whose mamma, upon the whole, does not spoil them more than pretty mamma's in general, having taken up their abode in a quiet house within an hour's railway reach of London, whither Mr. Egerton, now a sedate man of business, at nine a.m. every morning wends his footsteps, not seldom unaccompanied to, and invariably, except in very hot weather indeed, met at the station by a certain vision of violet eyes, lily brow, and rose-like cheeks, whose beauty neither Australian hardships or the cares of an increasing family have as yet dared to play tricks with;—yes, Rachel Egerton, in heart, and almost in appearance, still a child, is among the happy ones of the earth, happy as the day is long, with one exception—Frank's daily absence from her

side. That is Rachel's one little cross. She must forgive us, on looking round the world, for calling it a *little* one, more especially as every evening at six o'clock precisely, all day on Sunday, not forgetting some four or five weeks consecutively in the course of the year, it is gently lifted from her shoulders ; and this, with occasional outbreaks of measles, hooping-cough, or naughtiness on the part of Miss May, Grace, or Mary Egerton, or a discovery of some household misdemeanour, Rachel could not have believed her rather over-petted servants guilty of or a downright regular case of take-in from among the poor people around, of whom she is the constant benefactress, makes up the sum of little Mrs. Egerton's misfortunes. Like Algie, her happinesses could be counted by the hundreds, her unhappinesses by the bare half-dozen. Yes, Rachel's great sorrows were in the far distant past. We do but echo the prayer of all who love her, in saying may they long remain there.

On Mr. and Mrs. Egerton's journey home they remained a few days at Florence, and visited the Convent of the Annunziata, two of the nuns there claiming connection with Mrs. Egerton's family. One of these, a girl scarcely beyond the age of childhood, chaperoned them over the house, and greatly amused both Mr. Egerton and Rachel by the *naïveté*, mingled with the gay originality of her conversation. The other sister was older, graver, sadder-looking, and yet on her face also was written the expression, though differently engraven there, of unmistakable peace, of happy cheerful acquiescence in the will of Him who often, through the *via crucis*, conducts to His Jerusalem.

Augusta Cunningham is married—but not for her money,—and has settled down into the quiet lady-like wife of a man with sufficient discernment to appreciate the fine points of her character, and enough spirit to let her see from the first day of their acquaintance how greatly he

pitied, instead of as others had done, flattered or laughed at its imperfections. Augusta reverences her husband, and that in a nature like her own is all-sufficient for happiness ; while he, in return, regards with admiring affection a will becoming daily more and more independent of the world and its unrealities, because more truly above its influence.

Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham spend the larger portion of the year in travelling, much to the former of the parties dislike, who would greatly prefer a country life in England. His wife, however, ceases not to assure him, in a tone of such sweet pathos, that should they venture to reside in their bleak island home, she, to him at least, if to no one else, surely its fairest flower, will infallibly fade from human sight as a dreamy vision of the night—or a snow-drift melting into tears as he gazes on its fragility—that the poor man, after faint attempts at urging his own wishes on the subject, has at length become awed into silence, and with the most laudable meekness possible—submits to her decision. He has, however, two happy months in the year—the ones spent with Augusta, her husband, and two boisterous young grandsons, who having arrived at years of travelling discretion, are some of these days, says Augusta, to take turns in going abroad with grandpapa.

Old Phoebe, we must not forget her, has left London, but not for Algie's honeysuckled cottage at Haseldyne—Joseph, the gardener, for protector, and Rosary for constant companion. She has found a better home, has old Phoebe, than little Algernon would fain have provided for her, and where no one need to fear loving their earthly treasures over much, and where faithful service is faithfully rewarded. Algie and his nurse have met ere now!

One more visit to Haseldyne Park. It is Sunday morning, but not church time. Under the shade of the laburnum

trees, skirting the wide-spread lawn leading from the drawing-room windows, their golden foliage contrasting with the lilac and pink almond blossom around, is seated a lady, her missal open on her knee, a child's hand turning the pages. Which face fairer of the two 'twould be hard to say; for on the face of mother, no less than boy, is impressed, in colours never to be mistaken, heaven's chiefest loveliness—the landscape of our unsullied innocence. The child speaks; he has found the places and learnt the introit. Mamma must kiss him, and then he will repeat it; but the lady whispers him, with a smile, to await papa's arrival—he will so like to hear his Algie repeat his Sunday lesson.

"There he is, then," shouts Algernon, and mother and her boy have flown down the opposite pathway.

A moment more and three laughing voices mingle with the sound of distant church bells, while the young Countess of Morley, leaning on her husband's arm, returns up the avenue, announcing, with deprecatory gesture, while seeking to withdraw her hand, the necessity of making immediate preparation for church.

"Fetch mamma's bonnet and cloak, my boy, and your own little hat into the bargain," cries a well-known voice. He cannot part with her for that tiresome dressing; they have been separated since yesterday. He will put her bonnet on, and Algernon her cloak. That dark wavy hair requires no mirror's arrangement, and the little party set off to church together, and Algernon repeats his lesson on the way. He lisps Latin very prettily, and does not miss a word; and then asks, as a reward for being so good, whether he may not soon learn to sing at high mass, like dear Uncle Algie used to do, whose picture hangs up by the side of Uncle Arthur's in mamma's bed-room; and papa says Yes, because mamma's voice falters to pronounce the permission, and the earl takes her hand tenderly and calls

her his May, till the voice is calm once more, and she looks up into her husband's face, to let him see that she is happy—happy as in this world she ever can, nay, ever *wishes* to be; and yet, beneath the shadow of those soft, dove-like eyes, lingers an expression ineffacably written therein—an expression not of sorrow—no, nor even of sadness, but rather of a joy not yet fulfilled, of a capacity of happiness as yet left incomplete. It speaks, too, of absent faces—faces, perchance, all but as dear, though differently dear to St. Clair, and of the One face far dearer yet than even his. That look in his wife's sweet eyes speaks of love, intensest love for *him*; but not of that alone. They tell of home and patria, and St. Clair loves their mute language. It is to him her chiefest attraction.

Far away, in a secluded burying-ground on the southern coast of England, around whose quiet tombstones the restless ocean chants one eternal requiem, slumbers the earthly tabernacle of Arthur Templeton. With holy water and incense, and many a loving prayer, was the would-be warrior of the cross there laid to rest. That one gratification, amid the wreck of every brighter vision concerning him in days to come, had been granted to his sister; but not that alone, as the future remained to prove to her.

Far beyond that still cemetery—far off o'er sea and ocean, beneath the burning sun of India, the land of his adoption and voluntary exile, undeterred by difficulty of no common order on the one hand, injustice and oppression on the other—labours in the vineyard of his love one of Heaven's children—one who, but for Arthur Templeton's example, had, perchance, taken arms under a far different leader, and waged battle for another and more fascinating service. His name it needs not to record. It will be known hereafter, but in the world, like many another of the church's bravest warriors, is already forgotten. One heart alone remembers

it with ceaseless veneration ; one voice alone breathes it daily on her knee, bids her child lisp it in his prayer ; one memory forgets not, with gladsome thankfulness, in reviewing the agony of the past, in brooding over the joy of the present, or when looking onward to the glory of the future, that Arthur's destiny, his boyhood's dream, his manhood's hope, his quenchless aspiration, is realised.

His earthly mission, "to add one further ray to the glory encircling the presence chamber on high," is even more than fulfilled.

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